

Text of Israel's cabinet decision approving U.N. Resolution 425

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Here is the text of an Israeli security cabinet decision on its decision Wednesday to approve U.N. Security Council Resolution 425 calling for Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon:

"The ministerial committee for national security today adopted the following decision:

"1. Israel is accepting Resolution 425 of the U.N. Security Council so that the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) will

leave Lebanon with appropriate security arrangements and so that the Lebanese government can restore its effective control over southern Lebanon and assume responsibility for guaranteeing that its territory not be used as a base for terrorist activity against Israel.

"2. The government expresses its appreciation to the IDF soldiers and commanders who are battling to defend the inhabitants of northern Israel. The IDF will continue its

activity against terrorist threats in the 'security zone' until the necessary security arrangements are effected.

"3. The government of Israel calls on the Lebanese government to begin negotiations, on the basis of Resolution 425 of the U.N. Security Council, to restore its control over territories currently under IDF control and to prevent terrorist activities from its territory against Israel's northern border.

"4. Israel views the guaranteed security and safety of the residents of the 'security zone' in southern Lebanon and the soldiers of the South Lebanon Army as an integral part of the implementation of Resolution 425 of the U.N. Security Council and of any other arrangement for the restoration of security on our border with Lebanon.

"5. Israel will continue its efforts to achieve peace agreements with all its neighbours."

Saudi king says Jerusalem must be capital of Palestinian state

BEIRUT (AFP) — Jerusalem must be the capital of the future state of Palestine, Saudi King Fahd said in a magazine interview set to appear here Friday.

"Nothing will stop the creation of the state of Palestine, because when all's said and done, what's right will prevail," the monarch said in an interview with the "Revue du Liban".

"This state will not have the position it deserves in the hearts of Muslims, Christians

and all fair-minded people, if Jerusalem isn't its capital," King Fahd said.

He endorsed the appeal several months ago by Syria as well as that of the Arab League for a freeze in normalisation with Israel.

Normalisation cannot be carried out "unless concrete goals are attained, at the top of which is the return of Arab land and creation of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital."

This position "is the natural

result of the freeze in the peace negotiations caused by Israeli intransigence," he said.

The Saudi sovereign also said it was possible that an Arab summit might be held "within the framework of mutual agreement."

Turning to relations with Iran, he said the Saudi kingdom's ties with the Islamic republic "have continued to improve."

"The exchange of visits by officials of the two countries is a good indicator," he added.

Israel moves squatters at Palestinian request

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Israeli authorities said they relocated Palestinian squatters from their Arab east Jerusalem camp Wednesday at the request of the Palestinian office overseeing Muslim religious property.

Hundreds of Israeli police and soldiers showed up with 10 bulldozers at the camp of tents and makeshift shacks near the Mount of Olives a day after the Jerusalem municipality issued moving orders to the 10 families remaining at the site, witnesses said.

The Palestinian religious property office, or Waqf, asked the families to leave after it received permits to build a school for handicapped children on the site last year, municipality spokeswoman Johanne Malka told AFP.

"We have no other place to go," said Jawad Burkan, 22, adding that he lives in a shack at the camp with eight people.

Mr. Burkan said the camp residents were cooperating with municipality officials who had arrived to help them pack their belongings. The camp was set up in June by more than 60 families protesting what they said were anti-Arab policies by Israeli authorities in Arab east Jerusalem.

Thirty-eight families subsequently relocated after they received compensation from Orient House, the Palestinian headquarters in Arab east Jerusalem. Twenty-two other families have been moved to a Waqf building in Arab east Jerusalem but say the Waqf intends to move them again, hoping to use the building for education purposes.



Turkish riot police drag two leftist students by their hair Wednesday to the police van following a protest against the government in Istanbul. A group of university students were to protest in support of the extreme leftists' uprising in Turkish jails (AP photo)

Hostages at two Turkish prisons released in second day of standoff

ANKARA (AP) — Inmates at two prisons released the 15 prison officials they were holding hostage for two days on Wednesday after compromises by the government aimed at ending a crisis at seven jails nationwide, reports said.

Hostages were released and the protests ended at Istanbul and Ankara prisons, Anadolu News Agency and private Star television reported.

In the other prisons, 40 hostages remained in inmates' hands, but officials said they were close to reaching an agreement.

The government compromised Wednesday and decided to send 10 inmates, whose transfers from a separate jail sparked the action, to prisons close to their families.

Leftist prisoners in seven jails around the country took 55 prison guards and officials hostage Tuesday to push justice officials to reverse the transfer of their comrades away from Buca prison in western Turkey.

It was not clear, however, if the government's decision would end the protest.

A spokesman for a solidarity association with inmates announced earlier that the action would not end until the prisoners were returned to Buca.

Istanbul chief prosecutor Ferzan Cici, acting on behalf of the Justice Ministry, said he was confident the standoff would end soon. "Their concerns were that they would not have anyone to take care of them at prisons they were being sent to," Mr. Cici said.

The hostage-taking began in Ankara prison on Tuesday and soon spread to six other jails around the country. Leftist prisoners in three other prisons refused roll-calls Tuesday and Wednesday in support of the 350 prisoners involved in the standoff.

Justice Minister Oltan Sunugur ruled out the return of the 10 convicted prisoners to Buca prison, saying it is a jail solely used to hold suspects awaiting trial.

Relatives of both the hostages and the prisoners stood outside the prisons, where police and military units kept watch.

The prisoners are members of the outlawed Revolutionary People's Salvation Party-Front, which has taken responsibility for several killings and bombings in Turkey.

Turkish inmates often riot, stage hunger strikes or take guards hostage to demand improved conditions. The latest standoff raised concern for security in prisons and renewed calls for prisoners to be confined to individual cells.

Currently prisoners are often grouped together in large wards, and prison authorities struggle in cellular phones to communicate with comrades outside and in other jails.

Israeli cabinet secretary slams Arafat visit to Anne Frank house

TEL AVIV (AP) — A top Israeli official on Wednesday slammed Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's visit to the Anne Frank house as a political stunt that desecrated the memory of the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust.

Cabinet Secretary Dan Naveh, son of Holocaust survivors, said the visit was meaningless given what he termed Mr. Arafat's failure to uphold expressions of anti-Semitism among Palestinians.

Mr. Arafat should "act determinedly to denounce and uproot the shameful expressions of anti-Semitism and racism among the Palestinians," Mr. Naveh told Israeli army radio.

Mr. Arafat visited the Anne Frank house in Amsterdam on Tuesday in what was seen as a

first Palestinian recognition of the suffering of the Jews during the Nazi Holocaust.

Anne died of typhus at age 15 in the Nazis' Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in the final weeks of World War II after her family's hiding place in Amsterdam, reached by a staircase concealed by a bookcase, was discovered.

Mr. Arafat said the plight of the Frank family and millions of other Jews who died in the Holocaust was "a sad story" that should never be allowed to happen again.

Asked whether he didn't see value in photographs of Mr. Arafat's visit appearing in Palestinian papers, Mr. Naveh said: "No one wants him to pass on such messages as a gimmick."

"If souls could cry, they are weeping today," he added.

Iraq blast kills 6, injures 40

BAGHDAD (AP) — A fuel depot in southern Iraq caught fire and exploded, killing six people and injuring 40 others, a Baghdad weekly reported Wednesday.

The blaze took place in mid-March, but was first reported in Iraq on Wednesday. The reason for the delay was unclear. Iraq's state-run newspapers rarely publish information on such incidents.

The blaze in Hilla, 90 km south of Baghdad, was caused by a short circuit and continued for three days, killing six people and injuring 40, the Al-Mosawir Al-Arabi weekly reported.

Losses could range in the millions of dollars, the weekly reported.

Iraqi officials repeatedly have said that oil facilities are in poor condition due to U.N.

trade sanctions imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

They also say Iraq lacks proper fire and safety systems and is asking the United Nations to allow Baghdad to import fire fighting equipment as part of an oil-for-food programme.

That deal allows Iraq to sell limited amounts of oil to buy food, medicine and other humanitarian supplies.

The United Nations has said it will allow Iraq to boost its sales under the programme from \$2 billion to \$5.2 billion, but Iraq says that its facilities are no longer able to produce enough oil to meet that goal.

Oil ministry officials say the country's storage capacity has been reduced to less than half of the four million cubic metres or 25 million barrels that they were in 1989.

Egyptian police arrest sect members

CAIRO (AFP) — Egyptian authorities have arrested 29 members of an Islamic sect who believed Egypt would be swept by massive floods which they alone would survive, the interior ministry said Wednesday.

The sect members, including seven women and their leader Bahaaeddin Ahmad Hussein Akkad, were arrested on Tuesday near the Giza Pyramids just south of Cairo, a ministry statement said.

"They were arrested as they prepared to go to an apartment in the 6th of October City (south-west of Cairo) to gather there because they believed that massive floods would sweep within the first three days of April."

"They also believed that a ship would come to rescue them and

take them to a secure place because they are followers of the awaited mahdi," the statement said.

Mr. Akkad was revered as the "mahdi" or promised one by his followers who also denounced traditional Islamic teachings as contrary to their own beliefs and considered all forms of work a crime, it said.

The interior ministry did not specify any charges against the 29 but said they were members of a breakaway faction of the outlawed Tahlighi Wal Da'awa (Call and Sermon) group.

The sect members were submitted to experts of Al-Azhar university mosque, the highest authority on Sunni Islam, and the state prosecution was asked to investigate the case.

1,000 protest against Palestinian National Authority in West Bank

NABLUS (AFP) — Around 1,000 students demonstrated in this West Bank city on Wednesday to protest the detention of Islamist activists by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), witnesses said.

The students marched from Nablus University to the city's Judea prison to demand the immediate release of jailed members of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and

smaller Islamic Jihad.

Some of the protesters wore handcuffs or were hidden in makeshift cardboard jail cells while others carried banners saying "No to political detention."

The secular PNA is holding dozens of Hamas and Islamic Jihad members, some for months without charges.

Israel has demanded the authority take tougher action against the Islamist groups, which have killed

scores of Israelis in suicide bombings and other attacks over the past four years, as a condition for pursuing the peace process.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad are violently opposed to peace agreements signed with Israel by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) since 1993. The two movements are committed to the creation of an Islamist state in all of Palestine, including territory which now makes up Israel.

PRAYER TIMES

04:00Fajr
05:19(Sunrise) Dhuha
11:39Dhuhr
15:12Asr
17:59Maghrib
19:18Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweifeh, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
463785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel.
4622366
Anglican Church Tel.
4624534/4624811
St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox
Church Tel. 771751
Arman International Church
Tel. 865897
German-speaking Evangelical
Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church
in Amman Tel. 811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter
Day Saints Tel. 4654952
St. John the Baptist at De la
Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation
Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel.
4623541

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology.

Fine weather conditions will prevail, skies partly cloudy, with a chance of scattered showers, and winds easterly moderate. On Friday, temperatures are expected to dip slightly. There will be a chance of scattered showers in the northern regions and winds northwesterly moderate. In Aqaba, it will be warm, cloudy, winds northerly moderate and seas calm.

Amman06/21
Aqaba13/27
Deserts05/23
Jordan Valley12/26
Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 18, Aqaba 24
Humidity readings: Amman
45 per cent, Aqaba 28 per cent.

USEFUL

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 773111-19
PROGRAMME TWO
Thursday Programmes
14:10Cartoon — The Adventures of Dinky Di's
14:30Doc. — The Animal Show
15:00French Programmes
17:00NBA
18:00Drama — The Burned Bridge
19:00Le Journal
19:15Science Magazine — A Times Crochus
19:30News Headlines
19:35Comedy — Big Brother
20:00Drama — The Great Romances
20:30Drama — Dr. Quinn, the Medicine Woman
21:10The Oprah Winfrey Show
22:00News in English
22:30Feature film — "By the Sword"

23:59Comedy — Never The Same
00:30End of T.X.

Friday Programmes

14:10Cartoon — The Adventures of Teddy Ruxpin
14:30Wishbone
15:00French Programmes
17:00He Shoots, He Scores
17:30Doc. — Blue Water Dreaming
18:10Tarzan
19:00Le Journal
19:15Educational Programme — Allo La Terra
19:30News Headlines
19:35Comedy — Friends
20:00Documentary — Life on the Internet
20:30The Album Show
21:10Drama — "9-11"

22:00News in English
22:30Mini-series: "Woman on the Run" (Pt. II)
23:10Comedy — The Nanny
23:30End of T.X.

Church of Presentation, Sweifeh Tel. 5920146
The United Catholic Church Tel. 4624757
The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190
Evangelical Free Church Tel. 892679
The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052
The Armenian Catholic Church 771331

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Church of the Annunciation
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TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY
AMMAN:
Dr. Mazen Nshali830435
Dr. Fayer Dabbas759155
Dr. Adnan Zaghloul88140
Dr. Fikher Bilal552233
Firas pharmacy5661912
Ferdous pharmacy778336
Al Asena pharmacy4637055
Nairoukh pharmacy4644945
Al Salam pharmacy4636730
Yacoub pharmacy4644945
Shmeisani pharmacy4637660
Najib pharmacy847632

IRBID:
Dr. Ahmad Qam281484
Al Quds pharmacy1-1
ZARQA:
Dr. Zuhour Al Qadi996606
Khalifeh pharmacy985417

EMERGENCIES
Food Control Centre4637111
Civil Defence Department5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue4630341
Civil Defence Emergency199
Rescue Police 1924621111
Fire Brigade4617101
Blood Bank775121
Highway Police843402
Traffic Police896390
Public Security Dept.4630321
Water & Sewage Complaints897467
Amman Municipality Complaints787111
Telephone Information (directo-

ry assistance)121
Overseas Calls010230
Central Amman Telephone Repair4623101
Abdali Tel. Repair5661101
Jordan Television773111
Radio Jordan774111
Water Authority5680100
J. Electricity Authority815615
Electric Power Co.4636381
RJ Flight Information44-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport44-53200

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 5921199
The Islamic Abdi56661317
Hussein Medical Centre Tel. 836813, 856826
Luzmila4630195
Khalidi Maternity4642818
Akileh Maternity46424412
Jabal Amman Maternity4642362
Malhas, J. Amman4636140
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Al-Mutasher Hospital 56672279
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Al-Bashir77511126
Army, Marka89161115
Queen Alia Hospital 560224050
Amal Hospital5674155
ZARQA:
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Zarqa National Hospital091980560
Ibn Sina Hospital091986732

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FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200 where it should always be verified.
Information on other flights are supplied on phone 44 (52700) or 44 (53250).

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:45Sanaa (RJ)
07:10Dhahran (RJ)
09:00Bombay (RJ)
09:05Riyadh (RJ)
09:25Beirut (RJ)
09:40Muscat, Dubai (RJ)
09:40New Delhi (RJ)
10:30Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
14:35New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
16:30London (RJ)

Other Flights

17:45Kuwait (RJ)
17:45Abu Dhabi (RJ)
18:10Athens (RJ)
18:35Moscow (RJ)
19:00Bangkok, Calcutta (RJ)
19:25Al Ain, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
22:25Lamaca (RJ)

Other Flights

12:00Riyadh (SV)
13:10Muscat, Abu Dhabi (GF)
14:10Sharjah (AH)
14:40Doha (QR)
15:00Dubai (EK)
18:00Paris (AF)
19:25Tel Aviv (LY)
20:10London (BA)
20:10Beirut (ME)
20:40Cairo (MS)
22:20Istanbul (TK)
22:35Lamaca (CY)
00:15Amsterdam, Beirut (KL)
00:35Tunis (TU)
03:20Tunis (TU)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
05:45Beirut (RJ)
08:30Moscow (RJ)

Other Flights

10:45Abu Dhabi (RJ)
11:15Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)
11:20Amsterdam, Chicago (RJ)
11:25Aqaba, Paris (RJ)
11:30Al Ain, Dubai (add) (RJ)
11:45Kuwait (RJ)
12:20London (RJ)
12:30Athens (RJ)
19:35Lamaca (RJ)
20:10Cairo (RJ)
20:20Jeddah (RJ)
23:59Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta (RJ)

Other Flights

07:50Frankfurt (LH)
07:20London (BA)
07:45Beirut (ME)

NGO to launch integrated programme addressing violence against women

AMMAN (J.T.) — A Jordanian non-governmental organisation that nominated a local reporter for an international human rights award Wednesday said it will soon launch a programme to address violence against women.

Farah Daghestani, director of the Princess Basma Women's Resource Centre (PBWRC), said the programme will have an integrated approach to tackle the complex issue.

"This issue has several dimensions — it has aspects of policy, education, legal, etc.," she told the Jordan Times. "We will coordinate with the [Jordanian] National Committee for Women, and we are planning to do a

study with the police on honour crimes, on which there is very little information available."

The PBWRC recently nominated Rana Hussein, a crime reporter for the Jordan Times, for the Reebok Human Rights Award 1997 — awarded annually to four human rights activists around the world — for her coverage of honour crimes in the country. Ms. Hussein was presented with the award at a ceremony last month in New York.

In the letter of nomination, Ms. Daghestani said Ms. Hussein has made a "significant contribution to raising our national awareness... of these crimes by her own personal commit-

ment and journalistic skill. "She remains the first reference and authority on the topic of crimes of honour."

"If any changes occur, whether in terms of legal amendments and stricter prison terms [for those who commit such crimes], or changes in social attitudes and a growing rejection of these crimes, Ms. Hussein deserves recognition for her contributions."

In an interview with the Jordan Times following the award, Ms. Daghestani said she nominated Ms. Hussein because she believes her work is unique.

"She does a brave thing," said Ms. Daghestani. "And I know she has had a rough time. Not everyone likes

what she is doing. We want to show that [the Princess Basma Centre] supports her initiative."

Her Majesty Queen Noor also called Ms. Hussein prior to the awards ceremony in New York to congratulate her.

"I am really proud of you," she said. "You've made Jordan's name recognised [in the struggle for human rights]."

Their Royal Highnesses Crown Prince Hassan and Princess Sarvath thanked Ms. Hussein in a cable last week and said they wished her "great health, happiness and further success in serving our country and its citizens and communicating the truth."

Srouer defends Lower House's regular session performance

By Fairouz Abu-Ghazaleh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The speaker of the Lower House of Parliament on Wednesday defended the chamber's recently concluded four-month session, saying that popular criticism levelled against it was exaggerated and premature.

Speaker Sa'd Hayel Srouer told a press conference that Jordanians began levelling accusations at the 13th Parliament before the Nov. 4 elections took place.

Many Jordanians, including the Islamist-led opposi-

tion, which boycotted the ballot to protest what it said was a steady erosion of parliamentary powers and public freedoms under successive governments, have suggested that the House rubber-stamped government policies.

They claim that the 80-seat chamber failed to reverse controversial policies such as the much-opposed privatisation scheme and Jordan's participation in U.S.-Israeli Turkish naval manoeuvres held in the Mediterranean in December.

"This House includes

deputies who are qualified," Mr. Srouer told reporters. "Recent incidents and discussions indicated the deputies' level of responsibility."

Mr. Srouer said a visible and positive opposition was evident in the House, whose first term ended Sunday.

"Parties do not stick to a specific stand just for the sake of argument, their stands differ according to the issues at hand," said Mr. Srouer, who has held the influential speaker post for the last three terms.

Around 67 deputies have

asked for an extraordinary session in June to continue debate on pending draft legislation, including the new elections law.

Though many believe that His Majesty King Hussein will issue a Royal Decree endorsing their request, some deputies say the government will make sure the agenda does not include any controversial draft laws, such as amendments to the 1993 Press and Publications Law.

Unlike normal House sessions, agendas of extraordinary sessions are fixed by decree.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Minister, Iranian ambassador discuss bilateral cooperation

AMMAN (Petra) — Minister of Transport and Telecommunications Sami Gammoh on Wednesday received Iranian Ambassador to Jordan Mohammad Ali Subhani, with whom he discussed bilateral cooperation in a number of fields. Messrs. Gammoh and Subhani also agreed in principle on signing an agreement to operate two weekly flights by Royal Jordanian (RJ) and Iran's airline between the two countries. The Iranian ambassador extended an invitation to Mr. Gammoh to visit Iran and meet his Iranian counterpart to review means of promoting cooperation in transportation fields.

13 killed, 39 injured in road accidents from March 24-31

AMMAN (Petra) — A total of 13 people were killed and 39 injured in 663 road accidents in the Kingdom during the last week of March, Traffic Department sources said Wednesday. The sources said Amman accounted for 64 per cent of the accidents, followed by Zarqa with 11 per cent, and Irbid with 7.8 per cent.

NPRC, union sign agreement eliminating probationary period

AMMAN (Petra) — The National Petroleum Refinery Company (NPRC) and the general union of workers in petroleum and chemical industries Wednesday signed an agreement under which employees will not be subject to a probationary period upon appointment. Under the agreement, previous work experience will be considered an extension of the present employment, and therefore no probationary period will be required. The agreement said personnel transferred from the NPRC to the Petra Drilling Company will continue to enjoy the same salary and acquired rights, in addition to a 21-day annual leave.

U.S. loans Jordan additional \$3 million to purchase wheat

AMMAN (J.T.) — Jordan and the United States Wednesday signed a second agreement this year providing for an additional \$3 million in soft loans to help Jordan purchase about 20,000 metric tonnes of American wheat, according to a U.S. embassy press release.

The agreement was signed by Minister of Finance Suleiman Hafez on behalf of the Jordanian government, and by United States Ambassador to Jordan Wesley W. Egan and Deputy Administrator of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Mary Chambliss on behalf of the United States government.

The first agreement was signed between the two countries on March 11, 1998, and provided Jordan with \$15 million in soft loans to buy 100,000 metric tonnes of American wheat.

Both loan agreements are provided by the United States Department of Agriculture under the provi-

sions of Public Law 480 (PL 480). The loans are being extended at the concessional interest rate of four per cent per year. Repayment will begin following a grace period of three years in 18 annual instalments, the statement said.

With the signing of this agreement, the U.S. will have provided a total of \$18 million in soft loans to help Jordan buy a total of about 120,000 metric tonnes of American wheat for 1998.

At the ceremony, Mr. Biltaji said his ministry, together with the ministries of water and irrigation, municipal and rural affairs and the environment, and public works, will support the South Shuneh municipality in carrying out a tourist development project at the park.

Mr. Biltaji pointed out that the Council of Ministers still has to formally endorse the decision to transfer the park to the municipality, one of several remaining technicalities.

Mr. Biltaji, who earlier Wednesday led local volunteers on a clean-up campaign in the park, said that each citizen is responsible for ensuring a clean and safe environment.

He called on Jordan Valley municipal councils and other concerned authorities to carry out regular clean-up campaigns and protect the environment in the region, which is visited by many Jordanians on the weekends, especially in the winter and spring seasons.

Shuneh District Governor Ahmad Share' and Shuneh Mayor Tha'er Adwan addressed the ceremony, urging local citizens to take responsibility for protecting their region from pollution and keeping the park and other public places clean, so they may attract visitors and tourists from Jordan and elsewhere.

The mayor reviewed plans for the development of the park and designs for infrastructure services.

Jordan chosen to host Mideast chapter of rare bird organisation

By Ahmad Khatib
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Jordan has been chosen to house the Middle East committee of BirdLife International (BLI) because of the Kingdom's record of biodiversity conservation, according to an announcement at a recent seminar.

Adnan Buder, former director of the environmental consultation unit at the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN), was elected director of the committee, which functions under the umbrella of the Cambridge-based BLI, founded in 1922.

"The decision to select Jordan is another indication of the country's achievements in biodiversity conservation," Mr. Buder told the Jordan Times.

The decision was

announced during an RSCN seminar held last week in cooperation with BLI to launch an international campaign to protect endemic bird areas across the globe.

The latest book published by BLI, entitled "Endemic Bird Areas of the World," was unveiled at the one-day event. The book identifies 218 top bird wildlife areas in the world, 17 of which are in Jordanian areas including Wadi Rum, Wadi Mujib, Azraq oasis, and Aqaba.

According to the book's introduction, setting priorities for biodiversity conservation can help the world's governments and policy makers in making decisions ensuring that they meet their obligation to protect all life on earth.

As many as 80 bird species are found only in these endemic areas, the book said.

Therefore, conservation is crucial for the survival of such unique species "that are also very important and special for plants, butterflies, and reptiles as well."

Last October, Her Majesty Queen Noor, honorary BLI president, hosted BLI's first international gathering in the Middle East. The five-day event included bird watching at Dana Nature Reserve, Wadi Araba, Petra and Wadi Rum.

Iyad Abu Mughli, senior environmental officer at the United Nations Development Programme, told the meeting that UNDP's first priority in Jordan was to protect biodiversity.

"The UNDP has plans for many projects to protect native plants in the region and maintain biodiversity in the region, especially in Jordan," he added.

Ministry, Swedish road company begin implementing road agreement

AMMAN (J.T.) — Work is under way on the implementation of an agreement on cooperation between the Ministry of Public Works and Housing and the Swedish National Road Consulting Company (SweRoad), according to a ministry press release Wednesday.

The agreement was signed earlier this week by Minister of Public Works and Housing Nasser Lawzi and by Hans Eriksson, the vice president of SweRoad, it said.

According to an official at the ministry, the agreement is being financed as a grant

by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for the execution of services regarding the Road Sector Development Plan Project.

He said the objectives of this technical assistance is to enhance the efficiency of the ministry in terms of overall goals for the road construction and maintenance, develop adequate tools, procedures and skills, and enhance cooperation between the different road directorates toward the common goals.

SweRoad will complete the services within 18 months, the statement said.

between Thursday and Friday (no kidding).

In the best tradition of pranksters — and newspapers — the world over, the Jordan Times, in keeping with its annual tradition, decided to insert a little joke to catch the unwary in their daily routine.

From news agencies worldwide, we learned that a Japanese national daily reported yesterday that researchers had invented a machine that determines the real meaning of politicians' statements.

Similarly, the beer giant Guinness made an April Fool of the London-based Financial Times by putting out a spoof press release, under an April 1 embargo, announcing that it would become the official sponsor of Greenwich Mean Time and that Guinness Mean Time would be renamed "Guinness Mean Time."

The Iraqi Babel newspaper pub-

Jordan Valley town receives public park

SOUTH SHUNEH (Petra) — A public park near South Shuneh town in the Jordan Valley was turned over Wednesday to the town's municipality during a ceremony attended by Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Akel Biltaji and local officials.

At the ceremony, Mr. Biltaji said his ministry, together with the ministries of water and irrigation, municipal and rural affairs and the environment, and public works, will support the South Shuneh municipality in carrying out a tourist development project at the park.

Mr. Biltaji pointed out that the Council of Ministers still has to formally endorse the decision to transfer the park to the municipality, one of several remaining technicalities.

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Majali asks health ministry to finalise national insurance plan

AMMAN (J.T.) — Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali on Wednesday urged the Ministry of Health and Medical Care to speed up work on finalising a national health insurance plan to cover all citizens.

"A national health insurance system is of paramount importance. The ministry should study it thoroughly in a bid to cover all people living in Jordan and should take steps to offer citizens the best possible medical service," said the prime minister.

He said that under the new system, a citizen can choose

the hospital for treatment provided he or she pay the required share of the expenses.

Presently, only government employees and their dependants or poor people have the right to free treatment at government hospitals. Private sector employees must pay for treatment at both government and private hospitals.

Dr. Majali said it is important that Jordanian citizens receive the best medical service and feel an improvement in such service under a national health insurance scheme. Referring to allowances

given to public sector doctors, pharmacists and dentists, the prime minister said the government was restructuring the allowance system so that only those who deserve it receive it.

Minister of Health and Medical Care Ashraf Kurdi reviewed the ministry's plans in the coming phase, stating that special teams are conducting an in-depth study on a 12-year national health insurance scheme.

He also reviewed the ministry's training plans and its modernisation of hospital laboratories.



Acting Minister of Planning Nasser Lawzi and British Ambassador Christopher Batiscombe Wednesday sign the memorandum of understanding to provide British support to the Badia Livestock Project (Petra photo)

Jordan, U.K. sign JD500,000 memorandum for badia project

AMMAN (J.T.) — Acting Minister of Planning Nasser Lawzi and British Ambassador Christopher Batiscombe yesterday signed a memorandum of understanding whereby the U.K. will provide an additional JD500,000 for Phase II of the Badia Livestock Project, according to a British embassy press release.

Today's memorandum brings the value of U.K. support for this project to a total of nearly JD870,000, it added.

The project is funded by the U.K.'s Department for International Development (DFID), formerly known as ODA. Its aim is to promote the adoption by badia farmers of flock management methods that would help increase livestock productivity.

This second phase of DFID support to the Badia Livestock Project is focused on enhancing the Livestock Extension Training Facilities and Activities at Safawi. In cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, a technical training centre will be set up at the BRDP headquarters in Safawi.

Through the centre, a team of Jordanian and British experts will work in partnership with badia livestock farmers to develop and deliver extension services appropriate to their needs, the statement said.

This training assistance is designed to support the farmers' efforts towards increasing the economic productivity of their sheep. Training workshops will be targeted at the Livestock Project staff (Min-

istry of Agriculture and HCST), community based "para-vets," and male and female livestock farmers. The training programmes will focus on extension skills, gender awareness and monitoring and evaluation of small projects, according to the announcement.

Since 1994, the U.K. government's Department for International Development has been providing technical assistance to the livestock component of the BRDP Phase I of this project came to an end in December 1997. It included the attachment of three veterinary experts based in Safawi, and U.K.-based M.A. and Ph.D. training awards benefiting staff of the HCST and the Ministry of Agriculture.

what's going on

AMMAN INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVAL

Thursday
* Jordanian play "Another Bullet" at Bernada Al-Ba' House and Indian play "Khol Do" at the Royal Cultural Centre at 7:30 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. respectively.
Friday
* Palestinian play "The Island" at Osama Al-Mashtani Theatre, Abdali at 6:00 p.m.
* Palestinian play "A Bridge for Eves" and Tunisian play "Othello" at the Royal Cultural Centre at 7:30 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. respectively.

FILMS

* Spanish film "Mojeres al

borde de un ataque de nervios" at Instituto Cervantes, Jabel Amman on Thursday, April 2, at 5:00 p.m.

* Spanish film "Belenebros" (pt. II) at Instituto Cervantes, Jabel Amman on Saturday, April 4, at 5:00 p.m.

UNWGW SPRING BAZAAR
* Spring bazaar, sponsored by the United Nations Women's Guild of Jordan (UNWGW), at the Orthodox Club on Friday, April 3, 10:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m.

LECTURE

* "Orientalism and Post-Modernism" by Paul Hock at the Fulbright House, Shmeisani, (Tel. 568-4760) on Monday, April 2 (4:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m.)

EXHIBITIONS

* Works by Mohammed Al-Shanouni, at Rawan Al-Balqa, Fubaila, until April 7.
* Exhibition of electrical equipment, home appliances, clothing, perfume, sweets (marking the

advent of 'Eid Al Adha) at the University of Jordan, until April 7.

* Book exhibition at the Bishop's School, Jabel Amman, First Circle, until April 2.

* "Modern Jordanian Ceramics" by Raed Al-Dahleh at Instituto Cervantes, Jabel Amman, until April 10.

* Paintings on handmade paper at Noor Al-Husseini Foundation, off Wadi Saqra St. (Tel. 5699141/2), until April 25.

* "Modern Jordanian Ceramics" by Raed Al-Dahleh at Instituto Cervantes, Jabel Amman, until April 10.

* Works by Jordanian artist Yousef Baddawi at Darat Al-Funun, Jabel Weibdeh until April 9 (Tel. 4643251/2). Also displaying a private collection of Mandouh Bishara entitled "A Vision, An Identity" and works by contemporary Arab artists — "The New Collection"

Major blizzard to hit country? Don't take our word for it

By Jordan Times Staff Reporters

AMMAN — The great American novelist Mark Twain once surprised a number of people who had heard of his untimely demise by showing up very much alive. His comment? "Rumours of my death have been greatly exaggerated."

The Jordan Times would like to take this opportunity to inform readers that reports of a major blizzard due to hit the country were, well, greatly exaggerated.

Some readers may have read the article, "Major blizzard to hit country next week," without looking at the date of yesterday's issue, April 1, April Fool's Day.

However, the Meteorological Department, while denying a report of a blizzard in "a local newspaper," did announce yesterday that some scattered showers are expected

between Thursday and Friday (no kidding).

In the best tradition of pranksters — and newspapers — the world over, the Jordan Times, in keeping with its annual tradition, decided to insert a little joke to catch the unwary in their daily routine.

From news agencies worldwide, we learned that a Japanese national daily reported yesterday that researchers had invented a machine that determines the real meaning of politicians' statements.

Similarly, the beer giant Guinness made an April Fool of the London-based Financial Times by putting out a spoof press release, under an April 1 embargo, announcing that it would become the official sponsor of Greenwich Mean Time and that Guinness Mean Time would be renamed "Guinness Mean Time."

The Iraqi Babel newspaper pub-

lished a brief article, made prominent by a red-linked headline, quoting U.S. President Bill Clinton as saying that "it was time for lifting the sanctions."

On its part, the Jordan Times, in light of the copious amounts of snow that has fallen here, decided to stick (no pun intended) to this track.

We were overwhelmed yesterday with phone calls by numerous readers asking for confirmation of the report.

It was a further proof of how many and how vigilant our readers are, and that made us glad.

Among the first to call was the weatherman himself, who wondered first and laughed at the joke later. Scores of secretaries called from business and diplomatic offices, asking if their bosses should cancel their travel plans for the up-coming 'Eid Al Adha.

Officials at the ministry of tourism also enquired.

As is sometimes the case, however, not everybody got the joke.

Some argued that the newspaper was losing its credibility by publishing such items on April Fool's Day, and one lady even threatened to refer us to the Royal Court.

Last year, when the Jordan Times published an April fool on a Jordan Valley farmer who discovered the secret of cloning pumpkins, some officials at the Ministry of Agriculture were not very appreciative.

But we appreciated very much Bob Robertson's warning.

Based upon his forecast, we evacuated our offices in time, thus surviving yesterday's terrible earthquake, registering eight on the Richter scale, with the epicentre directly under the Jordan Times building!

Yeltsin inches towards conciliation in standoff with deputies

MOSCOW (AFP) — President Boris Yeltsin took a step towards conciliation over his choice for prime minister Wednesday, offering talks with both parliament speakers over the nomination of young reformer Sergei Kiriyenko.

The Russian president invited Yegor Stroyev and Gennady Seleznyov to meet him and Mr. Kiriyenko Thursday to discuss the controversial candidacy, which has threatened the most serious constitutional and political showdown in Russia since the parliamentary uprising in October 1993.

The state Duma lower house immediately backed down from a demand issued early Wednesday that Mr. Yeltsin drop his young protégé pending all-party talks on Russia's economic and political future.

But the chamber, packed with Communists opposed to a candidate they see as inexperienced, maintained its hostility to the president's recent flurry of political manoeuvres, damning his go-it-alone approach.

The demand of the president to ratify the candidate for prime minister without

serious examination with political forces does not correspond to the constructive cooperation between the different organs of state," deputies said in a resolution.

Mr. Yeltsin's spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembsky said Mr. Yeltsin was "ready to listen to his interlocutors" at Thursday's noon (0800 GMT) meeting at the Rus retreat, 100 kilometres west of Moscow.

He added that the invitation to the speakers of the Duma and Federation Council (upper house) amounted to the Kremlin's last word on the simmering controversy over Mr. Kiriyenko's candidacy until Thursday's rendezvous.

Duma speaker Seleznyov said the group of four meeting could be no substitute for the roundtable which deputies want convened to hammer out a broad-church cabinet and compromise government programme.

But the initiative remains Mr. Yeltsin's first move towards compromise in 10 hectic days of political spring-cleaning, starting with his dismissal of the government on March 23, which have brought the

Russian president eyeball to eyeball with his parliamentary foes.

Mr. Yeltsin, 67, has stuck by his young protégé, whom he plucked from obscurity last week to form a new cabinet and revitalise the reforms, and has threatened to dissolve the parliament if it rejects his candidate.

Communists and allied leftists who can almost muster a majority in the 450-seat chamber have vowed to block the appointment in a first vote Friday, saying Mr. Kiriyenko is too inexperienced and not representative of the full range of political opinion in parliament.

Two further "no" votes will enable Mr. Yeltsin to dissolve the chamber and call fresh parliamentary elections.

"The Duma and president have started political horse-trading, each trying to show the other that they are more powerful," said Nikolai Petrov of the Carnegie Endowment think-tank, commenting Wednesday's brinkmanship.

"Deputies need time to get something like government posts or concrete promises, and also for getting to know

Kiriyenko and his proposals better," he added.

But Mr. Kiriyenko himself categorically ruled out resorting to such bargaining merely to secure his own confirmation.

"A few concessions to the Duma members could probably resolve the problem of my being approved, but this is not crucial for me now," Mr. Kiriyenko was quoted by ITAR-TASS as saying. "For me it is the programme and formation of the new government which are important."

"Dragging me into (political) horse-trading will not work," Mr. Kiriyenko said. "Talk from positions of bargaining or blackmailing is impossible."

Instead Mr. Kiriyenko laid the emphasis on his programme rather than personalities.

"A government programme must not only appeal to everyone but bring good economic results," Mr. Kiriyenko said. "Appointments to a new government should be made with due account taken of the need to implement the proposed programme rigidly and quickly."



Australian Prime Minister John Howard reacts whilst reading a note handed to him during question time in Canberra's Parliament House announcing that his government had won a legal victory over Aborigines trying to prevent the construction of the Hindmarsh Island bridge in South Australia because it crossed sacred ground. Howard's controversial land rights legislation returned to the Senate on Wednesday, with its rejection possible forcing Australia into a race election (Reuters photo)

Australian senate resumes land rights battle

CANBERRA (R) — The Australian parliament Wednesday began reconsidering the government's controversial aboriginal land rights reforms, with the expected rejection of the bill likely to trigger an early election this year.

Aboriginal groups fighting the reforms said they remained confident the upper house senate would reject the bill, despite a government softening on some key clauses.

Prime Minister John Howard has threatened to call an early election, possibly as soon as July, if the senate rejects the legislation a second time. It has already done so once.

The government needs the support of at least two non-government senators to pass legislation through the 76-seat chamber, where the labour opposition, minor parties and independents hold a small majority.

A government spokesman said the senate was expected to vote on the bill late next week.

The minister responsible for the land rights legislation, Nick Minchin, urged labour to back down on its opposition.

"Labor should now get out of the way... stop its obstructionist tactics, let this bill through," he told reporters outside parliament.

The bill aims to end a land row between Aborigines and farmers over government pastures leased to farmers by guaranteeing aboriginal access to that land while limiting their rights to claim that access.

Even if the government wins senate approval, the legislation's fate remains in doubt because it will face a series of legal challenges.

A landmark case that was expected to resolve one key issue ended Wednesday without making it clear if the government had powers to pass laws detrimental to Aborigines.

The high court rejected an aboriginal challenge to a law that prevented them stopping the construction of a bridge on sacred land.

The Aborigines had argued the law was unconstitutional because the constitution allowed the government to pass laws only for the good of Aborigines and not to their detriment.

Critics of the land rights bill have said they would challenge it on the same constitutional basis.

But in its 5-1 ruling, the high court rejected the case on unrelated grounds, leaving the government's unconstitutional powers unclear and failing to erase one area of challenge on the land rights bill.

The government does not have to hold an election until mid-1999, but can call a snap poll at any time because the senate has already rejected two other bills twice.

However, Mr. Howard is not obliged to call an election immediately and is expected to wait until the senate rejects several other bills before doing so. These bills can then be pushed through a joint sitting if he wins the election.

Cambodian chopper crashes into Khmer Rouge minefield

SIEM REAP, Cambodia (AFP) — A government helicopter flying journalists and a British diplomat to a captured Khmer Rouge base in northern Cambodia crash-landed into a jungle minefield Wednesday.

The diplomat, the pilot and a senior Cambodian military official were hurt, the military said.

Others among the 36 on board escaped with cuts and bruises but concern was expressed because they would have to spend a night at Preah Vihear, a former Khmer Rouge base taken last Sunday.

The Russian-built Mi-8 helicopter came down just short of the landing field at the base on the Thai border, 165 kilometres northeast of Siem Reap.

The crash set off two mines under the helicopter, intelligence service Colonel Dam Hak, one of the passengers, told reporters at Siem Reap military Airbase.

Sources identified the British diplomat as Laurence Pickup, number two at the Phnom Penh embassy. A British official said the diplomat's injuries "did not appear to be life-threatening."

Pickup was brought to Siem Reap where he was checked by doctors at a private clinic.

AFP photographer David

van der Veen was one of at least 10 journalists on the helicopter which crashed at 0330 GMT.

Other news organisations represented on the flight included a photographer for the U.S. agency Associated Press, a reporter for the Daily Telegraph of London, a photographer and reporter for Reuters and at least one camerawoman for Worldwide Television News.

The British Broadcasting Corporation and the Japanese Nihon Denpa News had at least one correspondent each on board and there was a crew from an unidentified German television network.

British embassy translator, Ly Heang, who sustained a minor head wound and returned to Siem Reap with Mr. Pickup, said some of the journalists suffered cuts to their hands and faces.

The journalists were remained at Preah Vihear because no new helicopter could be sent from Phnom Penh to fly them back to the capital straight away, military sources said.

Diplomats in Phnom Penh expressed concern at the group staying in Preah Vihear because of the danger of a new attack, the mines and the malaria risk.

Deputy Chief of Staff Meas Sophea, who was

leading the trip, said the reporters were all fine. "Everybody is okay," he said. "But the helicopter cannot be used."

He said the journalists had extricated themselves from the wreckage and "were taking pictures."

Ly Heang said "we crashed with the door side facing the ground and there was no way to get out. The pilot had to break the windshield to get out."

"I was so frightened, I didn't think I would survive and didn't think I would ever be able to get back here."

The helicopter was unable to gain altitude for the planned landing just 20 metres from Preah Vihear temple, co-pilot Koy Tha said.

"We tried to land smoothly but we dropped on a minefield and a mine exploded," Koy Tha said.

The flight was arranged after government forces took Preah Vihear from Khmer Rouge defectors last Sunday.

Two helicopters made the trip Wednesday. A smaller chopper carrying Meas Sophea and several high-ranking Khmer Rouge defectors to the ancient temple landed safely.

Those seriously injured in the crash were brought to Siem Reap in the smaller helicopter.

End of Papon trial delayed by key defence questions

BORDEAUX, France (AFP) — The expected conclusion of Maurice Papon's trial for crimes against humanity hit a snag Wednesday when Mr. Papon's lawyer asked the court to consider three key questions touching on the Nuremberg definition of the charge.

The marathon six-month trial was to have gone to the nine-member, three-judge jury at noon.

But head defence lawyer Jean-Marie Varaut, who reiterated the Nuremberg criteria for crimes against humanity in detail Tuesday, asked chief judge Jean-Louis Castagnede to ask the jury to consider three additional questions.

These were: Did Mr. Papon have the ability to resist Nazi orders to round up and deport Jews? Did he know about the concerted plan to exterminate Jews and did he concur? And, would his resignation as number two in the Bordeaux Prefecture during the war have changed the outcome for the Jews?

The prosecution and the dozen or so lawyers for the civil parties in the trial all opposed the motion, and the court recessed to consider it.

Wednesday, Mr. Varaut told the court that Nuremberg Article Six defines crimes against humanity as the "systematic extermination of a people according to a concerted plan based on race or religion."

An individual, to be found guilty of that crime, must be proven to have had "knowledge of the extermination plan, believed in it, and willingly collaborated in its implementation," he said.

"War crimes are not crimes against humanity," said Mr. Varaut.

Before concluding his three-day closing argument, Mr. Varaut implored the jury to acquit Mr. Papon, saying his conviction would "trivialise" the concept of crimes against humanity and would constitute "the unjust sacrifice of an innocent man ... to appease the horror of a nation's collective guilt."

China hailed for openness during U.N. human rights visit

GENEVA (AFP) — China showed a spirit of good will during a visit by U.N. experts investigating arbitrary detention, allowing unprecedented access to prisoners, a report handed to the Human Rights Commission in Geneva said.

As a result of the "spirit of openness" the group was able to conduct all its interviews with prisoners without witnesses, in locations chosen at the last moment by the delegation with only U.N. interpreters present, the report issued Wednesday said.

The 27-page report summarises the findings of the U.N. working group on arbitrary detention which paid a ten-day visit to China in October 1997.

The mission was led by Chairman Kapil Sibal from India and Louis Joinet from France.

The mission visited two detention centres never before seen by a foreign delegation. One of them was the Shanghai Pre-Trial Detention Centre, which holds 385 suspects, including 29 women.

The group also went to Drapchi prison in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa, where it conducted private interviews with some 10 detainees.

Some of the detainees were picked at random and some chosen from a list of non-common-law prisoners. "In China this was an unprecedented initiative," the report said.

The experts said the precedent created by its visit "augurs well for the continuing cooperation" with the international community on human rights. The conclusions should be welcomed by the United States and Europe which have decided against sponsoring a resolution against China's human rights track record at the commission which ends April 24.

Western countries insist that dialogue should be given a chance to produce human rights improvements and point out that China has already made some progress, notably in releasing several leading dissidents and pledging to sign the U.N. convention on civil and political rights.

The document said changes brought about by a revision of China's criminal procedure law were a "step in the right direction." For instance, the growing role of lawyers in criminal trials, enabling them

to defend suspects more effectively, was in line with international legal norms.

China has moved from an "inquisitorial system of criminal justice towards a more adversarial system which, hopefully, will contribute to the protection of human rights," the report said.

However, the group pointed out that additional work still needed to be done. For example, though counter-revolutionary offences were no longer punishable under criminal law, they were judged as offences endangering national security, a term which remained undefined.

That could enable authorities to arrest and harass people who may be peacefully exercising their fundamental liberties.

The group urged China to amend its law so that any peaceful activity in the exercise of fundamental rights as guaranteed by the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights would not be judged a criminal offence.

It also urged China to state clearly that a person would be presumed innocent until proved guilty by a court of law.

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Bombs hit homes of four Basque politicians

SAN SEBASTIAN, Spain (R) — Bombs exploded at the homes of four local ruling-party politicians in Spain's Basque country early Wednesday in attacks blamed on the Basque separatist guerrilla group ETA.

One person was slightly injured in the wave of explosions, which occurred at entrances to houses and apartment blocks where the popular party officials lived, authorities said.

While the bombings mostly caused only minor damage, the strongest of the four blasts smashed down doors, shattered windows and wrecked a staircase in one building.

The first bomb went off just after midnight in the doorway of a town councillor's home in Fuenterabia, near the border with France, officials said.

The politician's sister, who had just entered the

house, suffered cuts and scratches from flying debris.

Other explosions occurred in the resort of San Sebastian and the border town of Irun. The homes of three town councillors and a regional party leader were targeted, police said.

Damaged buildings were evacuated while engineers checked to be sure the structures were safe.

Authorities blamed the bombings on ETA (Basque homeland and freedom), which has killed more than 800 people in its 30-year fight for an independent Basque state encompassing parts of northern Spain and southern France.

Officials said the attacks may have been in retaliation for a recent police crackdown on ETA that has resulted in nearly a dozen arrests and the dismantling of two of the group's dead-

liest units. Local popular party politicians have been the most recent victims of ETA shootings and car bombings.

"Once again, we are the targets," said Ricardo Hueso, head of the Party Branch in the Basque province of Guipuzcoa, the site of Wednesday's bombings. "But we will continue fighting them."

Following the attacks, ruling party politicians throughout the autonomous Basque region were warned to take extra security measures, state radio reported. Many are already protected by bodyguards.

ETA considers the centre-right popular party the heirs of the late Spanish dictator General Francisco Franco, who brutally repressed Basque nationalism during his nearly four decades in power.

OSCE gives its blessing to Armenia's elections

YEREVAN (AFP) — The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe Wednesday gave its qualified blessing to Armenia's presidential elections, saying that Robert Kocharian's margin of victory was large enough to overcome any misgivings about the vote.

"Overall, these elections are a step forward from the troubled elections of 1996 towards a functioning democracy," said the OSCE, which sent 140 observers to monitor Monday's run-off vote.

The 1996 elections had been marred by serious fraud which resulted in demonstrations by the opposition and riots in the capital. The authorities had to deploy tanks to restore calm.

But Wednesday the OSCE broadly welcomed the latest elections while acknowledging there had been "irregularities".

"In some areas the elections fell short of the commitment Armenia has made to OSCE standards," the OSCE statement said, read out to a press conference by U.S. diplomat Sam Brown. But he emphasised: "These shortcomings do not cause us to question the outcome."

The final results of the poll had still not been published at noon Wednesday, but figures from the tally of 95 per cent of the vote gave Mr. Kocharian a convincing 60 per cent against 40 per cent for his rival, the republic's Soviet-era leader Karen Demichian.

Among the irregularities noted by the OSCE, Mr. Brown said that "in some precincts in Yerevan there were large discrepancies between signatures and ballots cast."

"In several polling stations, extraordinarily high turnout raises questions over the integrity of the process in these locations."

"Such inequalities provide opportunities for fraud and abuse, opportunities which in sporadic cases were used," Mr. Brown noted.

There had been "irregularities in several instances" with "sufficient indication of vote fraud to require further investigation and possible criminal charges," he said.

But overall, he said, "election day activities were conducted calmly and in accordance with the law in the vast majority of districts."

The OSCE had been notably more critical of the first round of voting on March 16, describing it as "deeply flawed" and calling on the authorities to take concrete steps to prevent fraud in the run-off round.

The Armenian electoral commission, responsible for organising the vote, and several ambassadors from OSCE member countries in Yerevan, considered the OSCE's judgement harsh.

Armenia's new president, Mr. Kocharian, 43, was the leader of Nagorno-Karabakh, the mostly Armenian-populated enclave within Azerbaijan during a six-year war of secession which ended in 1994.

His war-hero status and non-nonsense nationalism, coupled with pragmatic free-market policies and his power base as prime minister and acting president, made him a firm favourite for the vote and he emerged as a clear leader in the first round ballot.

The Karabakh factor remained a key element in the run-off vote, particularly as the elections were initially prompted by the resignation in February of Levon Ter-Petrossian over crumbling support for his own more conciliatory proposals for peace in the enclave.

But Mr. Kocharian has also promised to pursue more liberal economic policies in a bid to attract greater foreign investment into Armenia, one of the poorest of the former Soviet republics.

Of the 2.3 million people eligible to vote Monday, turnout was 52.8 per cent — lower than in the first round, when 64 per cent of voters cast their ballots.

Scientists see further threat from Hong Kong bird flu

HONG KONG — Scientists have warned that a new bird virus which has killed people in Hong Kong last year could spread to other parts of the world.

Researchers at the University of Hong Kong said the virus, which has killed at least two people, was a new strain of the H5N1 virus.

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Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published in English by the Jordan Press Foundation. Established 1975.
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Peres has priorities right

THE FAILURE to rejuvenate the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks, whether through U.S., European or Arab intervention, has one obvious explanation: the current make-up of the Israeli government, in which a coalition of ultra-religious and right-wing factions hold Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at ransom and give him very little room to manoeuvre. In the wake of the visit by U.S. special envoy Dennis Ross, the former Israeli prime minister, Shimon Peres, said that unless his Labour Party joined the government, Netanyahu's hands will continue to be tied by extremists in his government who threaten to bring down the government if the prime minister shows any willingness to relinquish any occupied Palestinian territory.

Since, according to the latest Israeli poll, more than 53 per cent of the Israeli people agree to a 13 per cent redeployment as proposed by the U.S. and wish to see the peace negotiations move forward, against only 20 per cent who do not, why then maintain the present composition of the Israeli government against the will of the majority of the people? Peres' offer to join the Netanyahu government is open-minded and statesman-like, unlike the Labour Party leader, Ehud Barak, who has another agenda in mind: to topple Netanyahu altogether and seize power. Overall, Peres seems to have his priorities straight, especially at a time when unseating Netanyahu is near impossible, now and in the foreseeable future. Why then prolong the agonies associated with a deadlocked peace process on all fronts by refusing to come to the rescue of the elements within the government who are as keen as Labour to collect the dividends of peace?

We believe that Peres is right in seeking a workable arrangement with Netanyahu, under which the Oslo accords would have a better chance of being implemented and the negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks resurrected from their current state. Otherwise, the parties will continue to face the same kind of hurdles currently in the path of all efforts to put the peace talks on track again.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Tareq Masarweh commented on the failure of U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross in his mission to break the deadlock in the peace process saying that now the U.S. has failed to persuade Israel to implement the Oslo accords or even accept Washington's compromise concerning the withdrawal from the occupied lands the U.S. should abandon its impossible mission. It is time for the Arabs to act, if not on the Palestinian track then on the Lebanese track, and it is hoped that Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria whose government officials have been meeting to discuss the peace process will openly demand that the U.N. force Israel to implement its Security Council Resolution 425 concerning the occupied Lebanese territories, said the writer. Masarweh said the Arab states which had backed the U.S. in its aggression on Iraq in implementation of a U.N. resolution against Iraq should demand that the world organisation use force to evict Israel from Lebanon in accordance with Security Council Resolution 425 and to impose economic sanctions on the Jewish state. The writer said the three Arab states which are planning a mini summit soon should focus on such a demand which they should present to the U.N. and the world community.

Al Arab Al Yawm's Saleh Qallab addressed remarks and suggestions by Hamas leader Khaled Misha'al directed to Palestine President Yasser Arafat in which he called for the cancellation of the Oslo accords and the adoption of a new strategy in dealing with Israel. The writer said Misha'al's idea of ending all bids to arrive at a peaceful solution with the Israelis and to use all possible means to end the presence of the Jewish state is mere sweet, but irresponsible talk reminding the Arabs of the ideas advocated by outspoken leaders in the 1950s and the 1960s. Indeed Misha'al's remarks are sweet words but they are by no means realistic since the situation calls for negotiation rather than confrontation in light of the present imbalance of military power and the prevailing international situation, according to the writer. He said even little children in the Arab World realise that the U.S. is totally biased towards Israel and what is required is not seeking unproductive slogans to win sympathy for the Palestinian cause. The writer said Misha'al's remarks as aired by the Qatari satellite television station Al Jazeera suggest that the Palestinians resort to car bomb attacks which have been condemned and can by no means help the Palestinians, and the mere slogans cannot achieve their legitimate rights.

View from Academia

Customer satisfaction not yet much of a bargain

THERE IS a huge, even colossal, difference between the era we are in and the era we are entering. While in other more fortunate (i.e. more serious, meticulous, and orderly) nations of today's world the transition from the former into the latter is proceeding somewhat smoothly (much work has been and is being done to prepare for and facilitate the transition), in ours, the transition is not going to be that easy. Old habits are still with us, as well as old attitudes, old notions, old beliefs, old ideologies, old theories, old whims, old customs and old practices. We, it seems, adore (dote on) the old, the outdated, and the defunct. Worse, many of those who are to guide us and oversee the transition are themselves obsolete or archaic — and outrageously so. And this is no joke.

The other day, I was reading a book which I had borrowed from a colleague of mine ("The Essence of Total Quality Management" by John Bank, Prentice Hall, 1992). Technical, dry, and boring? Not in the least, and I highly recommend it to everyone for sheer enjoyment, in addition to the depth of its ideas.

The first part of the book includes chapters whose very titles are telling: "The Customer as King," "Consumer Power," "Customer Care," etc. You see, the new era we are supposed to be entering — call it what you will: the New World Order, the New Millennium, the Twenty First Century, the Era of Competition, Quality, Globalisation, Free Market Economy, Internet, Science & Technology, etc. — is one where much emphasis is placed on the quality of service. It is a service-oriented (perhaps even service-obsessed) era. It is also customer-oriented.

So? Well, service as a concept/idea/ideal/aim/objective/purpose/end is going to be (it already is in the luckier nations) the most important, prior, crucial, ultimate concern for each and every person or institution offering services to people in each and every walk of life. Meaning what? Meaning that not only is the green grocer, taxi driver, shop, restaurant, hotel, bank or factory

offering services but also the civil servant, the teacher, the administrator, the school, the university, the government institution, the press and media establishments, etc. When we say such individuals and institutions are (or supposed to be) service-oriented, we mean that the quality of whatever service they offer has to be a top priority. What is also meant is that if any of the said individuals or institutions fails to provide quality service — that is, satisfies customers' needs and meets customers' demands — the very well-being, welfare of such an individual or institution is at stake. And the well-being and welfare of society at large.

The era we are talking about is an era of tough competition and hard-earned money. Instead of one university, there will be 10; instead of one school, there will be 20. In the end, it is survival of the fittest (i.e., the best). The poor, the mediocre vanish, disappear, evaporate. But so is the case also with non-money-oriented individuals and establishments (i.e. the public sector); they have to compete or perish. And if they do not themselves perish, they kill the group, society, country which they are supposed to serve.

Here, customer satisfaction is key. Survival, progress, and success will be tied to customer satisfaction. As the title of one of the chapters of Bank's book states, the customer is "king."

In this same chapter, the author mentions a popular poster which many shops, offices, and factories (in the lucky countries) used to highlight — and which every competitive shop, office, factory and institution applies literally and faithfully now. The poster reads:

- The customers are the most important people in our business.
- They are not dependent on us. We are dependent on them.
- They are not an interruption to our work. They are the purpose of it.
- They are doing us a favour when they come in. We are not doing them a favour by serving them.
- They are a part of our business, not outsiders.

— They are not just a statistic. They are flesh and blood human beings with feelings and emotions like ourselves.

— They come to us with their needs and wants. It is our job to fulfill them.

— They are deserving of the most courteous and attentive treatment we can give them.

— They are the lifeblood of this and every other business. Without them we would have to close our doors.

The last motto is no joke. At the end of all these mottos, the following statement appears: "Don't you ever forget it!"

Now, where does our part of the world (with its individuals and institutions, public and private) stand in relation to these crucial work ideals, values or ethics? Reverse each and every motto, you find it applies to us perfectly. How do you think number 3 reads in our society. Most definitely, something like this: "Customers are an interruption to our work. They are a nuisance. Your newspaper, phone call and cup of coffee are more important than they are." How does number 4 read? Something like this: "We are doing them a favour every time they come in. And they are so unappreciative." How does number 6 read? "Customers have no feelings. Abuse them." How does number 7 read? "Customers come to us with their needs and wants. It is our job to frustrate and torture them." You get the picture.

Should the customer be king in our part of the world? No way. He/she is a clown, a squirrel.

Much as we wish to be optimistic (and much as we highly value the progress that has been made in our society, which is at best humble, fragmentary or at the level of the some, not the many), we feel there is an abyss, a bottomless pit, and a huge chasm separating us and the promising (shall we say?) era we are expected to enter. Between the era we are in and the era we are entering lies an ocean. To cross it, we need a lot of bridging.

Arabs set high price for Israel to quit Lebanon

By Robert Fisk
 in Beirut

ISRAEL IS not leaving southern Lebanon. Despite all the honeyed words from Israel itself, despite all the reports on CNN, despite the private suspicions of Arab diplomats who should know better — Israel is not going to withdraw a single soldier from its occupation zone 60 miles south of Beirut. Indeed, recently, more Israeli troops have been sent into frontline positions previously held by Israel's proxy "South Lebanon Army".

True, Israel would like to leave. It lost 39 of its occupation troops in southern Lebanon last year and another eight have died in action in 1998; its Lebanese militia ally has lost a further 29 men in the same 15 months. Almost equally serious is the fall in casualties among Israel's Hizbollah enemies. While the guerrillas were losing as many as 100 men for every Israeli killed 10 years ago, they are now taking casualties on an almost one-to-one basis. Just 82 Hizbollah men have died in the past 15 months, only six more than Israel and its militia. The outcry from the mothers of Israeli soldiers serving in Lebanon grows.

Listening to Israeli politicians these past two weeks, the world might be forgiven for

believing the mothers will get their way. Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister — who is not interested in abiding by U.N. Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 (calling for total Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territory) — suddenly announced he wanted to abide by Security Council resolution 425, which calls for a total and unconditional withdrawal from southern Lebanon. The Israeli cabinet, we are told, has "agreed" to a withdrawal.

But Israel wants conditions attached. It wants a promise that the Lebanese army will safeguard the border and prevent cross-border attacks. And it wants the Hizbollah disarmed before a withdrawal. The first desire is reasonable enough. But the second will never be agreed by the Arabs. For two reasons. Firstly, Syria wants Israel to withdraw from the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan Heights, and Syria's support for the Hizbollah is the only pressure it can bring upon the Israelis to hand back Golan as well as southern Lebanon. Secondly — in the words of a former Lebanese diplomat — Israel, in the eyes of the Arabs, has run out of credit. "Oslo was a big test for us and for the Israelis," he said. "Israel signed the Oslo agreement. But despite its signa-

ture, it is still controlling much of the West Bank and is building even more Jewish settlements on Arab land. What is to stop them doing the same thing if we agreed to their conditions for withdrawal from Lebanon?"

"We could disarm the Hizbollah, which is the only force pushing them to leave, and then the Israelis might find a reason to stay. And we could do nothing about it. We learned a lot from Oslo and we are not going to make the same mistake again. These deals need international guarantees, not just peace accords that can then be broken."

In Cairo, the Arab League rejected Mr. Netanyahu's proposal for a withdrawal. Faris Bouze, the Lebanese foreign minister, told delegates that if Israel wanted to abide by resolution 425 — passed in 1978 after Israel's first invasion of Lebanon — then "it should just pack up and get out." In reality, numerous Hizbollah officials have made it clear the guerrillas would not pursue the Israelis over the border. Hizbollah has already set up a political organisation within Lebanon's own internal political structure to secure a future once the war is over. An Iranian government spokesman, Culture Minister Atallah Mahajani, has himself said if Israel leaves

Lebanon, there would be "no need to continue its resistance activities." Since Iran arms the Hizbollah — if less generously than America arms Israel — this was a significant remark.

The ironies of the situation, however, are all too clear. Whereas 20 years ago, the Lebanese demanded an Israeli withdrawal, and the Israelis refused, now the Israelis are demanding a withdrawal and the Lebanese are turning them down. This has provided good propaganda for the Israelis. Here they are, vainly demanding to end their own occupation while the world accuses them of renegeing on the "peace process." In truth, southern Lebanon is the only area where the Israelis are bleeding — literally — to hang onto occupied land; and the Arabs are not going to oblige them by letting them go.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon have been in southern Lebanon for 20 years and have signally failed to complete their mission of moving up to the Israeli frontier and securing the sovereign territory of Lebanon for the Beirut government. U.N. forces are a mile further from the Israeli border than they were two decades ago.

— The Independent

U.S. frustration at stalled peace talks not sure signal of disengagement

By George S. Hishmeh
 Special to the Jordan Times

WASHINGTON — American exasperation was evident Monday in what is likely to be an empty threat voiced by the spokesman of the U.S. State Department. "There are many options, and one option has always been to disengage" from U.S. efforts to revive the derailed Middle East peace process.

James Rubin was sounding off about the failed attempt of U.S. mediator Dennis B. Ross to convince Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat to resume their peace negotiations in accordance with an "American plan" which has yet to be revealed.

"If the two sides aren't prepared to make the hard calls, the catalyst can only do so much," he intoned.

The U.S. disappointment was reminiscent of a similar gesture made by President Gerald Ford (and his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger) in 1975 when he announced a "reassessment" of U.S. policies towards Israel, suspending new military and economic agreements with the Jewish state, after the U.S. failure to arrange for a second Israeli pullout from the Sinai Peninsula.

At that time, 76 U.S. senators sent a letter to President Ford, urging him to be "responsive to Israel's economic and military needs" — a clear sign, according to William Quandt, who was then on the White

House staff, that "continued pressure on Israel would be politically counterproductive." In what appeared to be an afterthought, Rubin told reporters accredited to the State Department that disengagement was "not an option that the Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is advocating or an option that we would like to see happen at all."

Regardless, the mood at the State Department was not pleasant. Some officials maintained privately that Secretary Albright had registered her deep frustration and concern over Netanyahu's stalling when she talked over the weekend via a telephone hookup from her office to some 50 Jewish leaders here.

The interpretation given by an American Jewish spokesman of the talk was not entirely accurate, they said, especially his denial that she was hoping they would place pressure on the right-wing Israeli government.

No transcript of the remarks were provided by the State Department. An American-Jewish spokesman insisted that Albright assured them the United States would not present Israel with an ultimatum for a withdrawal from the West Bank or that the Albright talk was an attempt to blunt Netanyahu's lobbying efforts among Jewish organisations here.

Even Ross let out some steam in Jerusalem on the eve of his return from a fourth and final meeting with Netanyahu on Monday: "At some

point we have to bring this (American) effort to a conclusion."

In brief, the American plan reportedly calls for a 13.1 per cent withdrawal from the West Bank to be undertaken in three phases over a three-month period, in return for a systematic Palestinian crackdown on militants.

The American initiative stems from the failure of the Netanyahu government to implement its pledge under a U.S.-backed agreement last year to carry out three troop withdrawals by this summer. The Israelis now favour only one pull-back before entering into final status talks — a position rejected outright by the Palestinians.

The U.S. approach aimed at creating "conditions necessary for fast-track permanent-status negotiations" was recently detailed by Martin Indyk, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs, in testimony before the House International Relations Committee.

The four elements in the American approach, he said were: "First, there needs to be enhanced security cooperation and an intensified effort — and a verifiable effort — on the part of the Palestinian Authority to fight terror and the terrorist infrastructure in territories under its control."

"Second, further redeployments in accordance with the existing agreements need to be implemented by Israel."

"Third, there should be a timeout

in regard to unilateral steps which undermine confidence in the negotiating process. And this is, we believe, an obligation of both sides."

"And finally, we believe there should be the resumption of permanent status negotiations and the conduct of those negotiations on an accelerated basis with a mutually agreed target date."

This American position does not sit well with pro-Israeli groups here. Robert Sadoff, executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, complained to the same committee that the United States "has not matched this effort (at reviving the talks) with consistency in monitoring the two parties' commitments to each other and in fulfilling its own, independently-made commitments to them." He faulted the United States for failing to issue statements "calling specifically for Palestinians to fulfill their outstanding Oslo obligations, especially those outlined in the U.S.-authored and -initiated 'Note for the Record' appended to the Hebron Accord." He actually thought that "at times and perhaps inadvertently," the U.S. issued statements and adopted positions that seem to relieve Palestinians of some of their Oslo obligations.

Sadoff calls for a "concession of historic importance from the Palestinian side (that) is comparable to the Israeli compromise," which he identified as the "re-partition of mandatory Palestine in which Israel

would withdraw from virtually all of Gaza and large chunks of the West Bank, (and) the still emerging (Israeli) consensus on some form of Palestinian statehood."

The Palestinians, he thought, could offer: "a concession regarding Palestinian claims to Jerusalem as capital of a future state; a concession regarding refugees and their claim to a right of return; and a concession regarding territorial claims in the West Bank." He did not provide any details, however. He added, "If there is to be peace, there will be territorial compromise, with Israel retaining significantly less territory than currently under its control but with Palestinians forever relinquishing some significant part of the territory they claim, too."

Such a Palestinian declaration, he said, "would parallel the historic Zionist concession regarding a re-partition of Mandatory Palestine and provide a hopeful and equitable basis on which the parties can proceed with 'final status' negotiations."

No doubt President Clinton will find much on his plate when he returns later week from his history-making trip to Africa. Whether the incumbent president will follow in the footsteps of Ford remains to be seen; he surely cannot afford a failure in this respect.

LETTERS

Sad situation

To the editor:

REFERRING to the letter to the editor headlined "Double Whammy" (Jordan Times, March 30, 1998), I too have a few comments to add in criticism of the traffic police force.

To begin with I have often wondered if the purpose of the traffic police is to decorate the curbside while they chat amongst themselves. I wonder how they seem to be oblivious to the many violations taking place before their eyes. Or perhaps what I perceive as a violation (i.e., Making a left hand turn from the right hand lane and cutting off other motorists) is proper driving to them.

What sort of training are these officers required to take, if any? Whatever the answer, it remains significant that without proper standards, chaos will prevail.

It is sad that the people who could make the proper changes do not care to do so.

Ziad Z. Hamzeh
 Amman

The Jordan Times welcomes letters and contributions from its readers on any issue they wish to tackle. Letters intended for publication should contain the writer's full name and preferably address as well. Names can be withheld upon request but only under special circumstances. Letters are subject to editing and abridging.

Marshal Habel Majali

Dear Sir,
 I am writing to you to express my disappointment and frustration over the situation in the Middle East. The peace process is moving very slowly, and it seems that the Israeli government is not serious about reaching a final agreement. The Palestinian Authority is also facing many difficulties, and it is hard to see how they can continue to hold out for a better deal. The situation is very sad, and I hope that the international community will step in to help resolve the conflict.

In the picture

Dr. Jean-Louis Elias

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Prominent industrialist puts Jordan's food industries under the microscope

By Ghaila Alul
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Poor quality and high prices of local products, processed from imported raw material, were cited by a leading Jordanian industrialist as major obstacles hindering the growth of the Jordanian food processing industry.

According to Elia Nuqul, president of the Nuqul Group which controls a number of companies, the constrained food processing sector's contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) is also modest.

Lack of adequately trained and specialised personnel in management, marketing and technical skills, weak research and development as well as limited availability and inadequacy of developed industrial support services also pose major constraints for the sector that relies heavily on imports to meet steadily growing needs, said Mr. Nuqul.

"The value of agricultural imports is more than 400 per cent higher than the value of farm exports and is about 150 per cent of agricultural GDP," Mr. Nuqul indicated in an address to a group of European investors who were visiting Jordan recently.

Jordan's food imports average 22 per cent of the Kingdom's total value of imports, said Mr. Nuqul.

"During the period 1990-1996, the quantity of import-

ed food increased by about 222 per cent and the value by about 77 per cent," he added.

The prominent industrialist attributed this increase to population growth, the influx of Jordanian and Palestinian expatriates who returned from Arab Gulf countries and the improved standard of living in general.

In 1996, Mr. Nuqul pointed out, food imports totalled about 2.5 million tonnes valued at approximately JD 745 million.

According to Mr. Nuqul, local food producers are not motivated to increase investments in the food processing industry and to improve the quality of products because of the relatively low purchasing power of the average Jordanian consumer.

Food processors usually complain of delays in laboratory analytical tests of imported products which, in some instances, are not allowed entry into Jordan, said Mr. Nuqul.

In addition, results of laboratory tests carried out by Jordan do not always match those obtained by international institutions, he added.

"Some standards adopted by certain departments in Jordan are not in harmony with those of international organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to the extent that some suppliers wonder why these standards imposed by

Jordan are more stringent and rigorous than those applied by highly developed countries," Mr. Nuqul said.

Packaging of Jordanian food is not up to standards, he added, stressing: "Packaging not only influences consumer choice but does also affect the product's hygiene and safety as well."

Because of Jordan's small market, the food processing industry is not capable of achieving the economies of scale. "This reduces overall productivity and increases production costs," he explained.

He added that the relatively small-size food plants render the food industry economically unfeasible.

"High tech and good quality machines and equipment are specifically designed for mass production and sizeable markets. Jordan, with its small market, cannot afford such relatively expensive equipment," he said. "This drives local industries to opt for cheaper and less efficient equipment and machines."

Mr. Nuqul stressed the need for improving and developing the food processing industry in order to effectively compete in international markets, especially that Jordan is in the process of integrating into the world economy.

"If the problems persist and are not properly and effectively dealt with, the situation will be aggravated especially once Jordan

opens up to foreign imports as required under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreement," he said.

Jordan has last year opened negotiations to accede to the Geneva-based WTO and hopes to join the group in the near future.

Jordan signed an association agreement with the European Union (EU) last November to create a free trade area by the year 2010. Under the deal, Jordan's industrial and agricultural products will enjoy free access in EU markets immediately after the agreement is ratified by the parliaments of the 15 EU countries.

According to officials the agreement is expected to be ratified by January 1999.

Businessmen say Jordan is facing a challenge to bring up its industries to international standards in order to maximise the benefits from both agreements.

"We believe that the sector has to adopt the necessary international standards such as ISO and HACCP — a system to analyse risks in food industries — in order to enable Jordan to reach a competitive level," Mr. Nuqul said.

To attain such a position in the market, he added, Jordan must make substantial improvements in the industrial support services and address the areas which the industry is lacking.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Catch up on correspondence and phone calls this morning. This afternoon, people will tend to clam up. Tonight, there will be a conflict between work or a social activity you want to attend. You may have to work after the party to get everything done.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You feel like you have lots of money to spend. That feeling could coax you to dig into your reserve and buy something really expensive. Then, of course, you'd be hit by buyer's remorse. Stay away from the stores until after dinner, or wait until tomorrow.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Race around this morning and check things off your list. You'll be at your most effective and efficient. Watch what you say tonight. Don't let the first thing pop out that wants. You cause a problem for yourself that would not be easily repairable.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) There's a lot going on this morning, but that's OK. Just keep putting one foot in front of the other. You're getting to firmer ground. You'll still be facing some difficult situations, but you'll be much more confident, and that helps a lot.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) The morning is best for closing deals, especially if money is concerned. It's also a good time for meetings with friends and associates. Later in the day, you'll be too busy. Plan to spend tonight quiet, also. You've got things to think about.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Conditions will get easier as the day goes on. Get together with friends and associates later today and figure out the best course of action. It never hurts to plan ahead. Give it one more try and you could succeed.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Do your homework this morning, including making a long-distance phone call. You'll need to have your afternoon free. An older person will require you to take action, and quickly. Think about this ahead of time, so you'll know what to do.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Avoid confrontational talk this morning. By this afternoon, the issues might get resolved without discussion, to your relief. Your workload has been intense, but be calm, patient and persistent. Things will be better by tomorrow.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Confer with your partner this morning so you can get your financial affairs figured out. Then you can go shopping. If you're going to spend a fortune, make sure it's on something that will still be around and functional after it's been paid off.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) You're stressed and overworked, and your sense of humour is starting to dissolve. You're going to have to put in the correction soon or you'll become too cranky and irritable even to live with yourself.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You're going to have trouble getting to work on time this morning. If you're self-employed, this is not a problem. Work late tonight instead. If you're not self-employed, you'd better call in and let the boss know you'll be late.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) The morning is chaotic, but afternoon will be wonderful. Don't let a couple of snafus turn you from an optimist to a pessimist. Keep believing wonderful things can happen, or you might miss a few of them.

Birthstone of April: Diamond — Amethyst

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR FRIDAY, APRIL 3, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Something requires your attention at home. If nothing around the house is broken, be careful, especially around sharp objects. It's more likely to be a personality conflict, however. You and your roommate or significant other need to have a good talk.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You're an intelligent person and getting smarter every minute. That's because you're practising your skills by working with an expert. If you're not, you should be. That would be an excellent way to spend this afternoon, for sure.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Your friends are all excited about doing something together. You want to join in, but you're a tad short on funds. You could go without something else. Or you could sell something. Knowing you, the latter's the more interesting alternative.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) The sun is in Aries, a fire sign, and Cancer is a water sign. Together, they make steam. That's sort of what's happening today. An older person is being obnoxious, but that's OK. He or she is pushing you to take action you would otherwise have avoided.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Business deals keep you busy longer than you intended. You're going to be in a good mood for sports on Sunday, so schedule some activity for then. Meanwhile, do what needs to be done to get the bureaucrats off your back.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) You and your friends can come up with marvellous ideas today. Meet early in the day to brainstorm. Get to bed early tonight to avoid an argument. People will have a tendency to get cranky after dinner.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) An older person is going to request something that only you can deliver. Now all you have to do is put what you've learned into action. Your career could greatly benefit as a result, so don't hesitate. Timing is everything.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Too much of a good thing can almost become a bad thing. You're in that situation right now. There are lots of opportunities, but deciding which one to pick could just about drive you crazy. Feast or famine, right? Don't be pushed into anything.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Pay off as much of a nagging bill as you can to free yourself up for other things. But even if this takes all your money, you don't have to cancel your date. You'll just have to do something less expensive. The best things in life are still free.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Invest in a person who can take some of the weight off you. With the right person helping, you'll do a better job than you could have all by yourself. Stop postponing finding a solution, and delegate instead.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) If you can give work your full attention, you'll get more done than you have all week. You'll also get a chance to use skills you've recently acquired. If you relax, this whole experience could be kind of fun.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) This is a marvellous evening to fall in love, except for a couple of problems. Not having enough money adds to the confusion. Before you give up on your dreams altogether, talk to a person who's in a position to help.

Birthstone of April: Diamond — Amethyst

Kabariti: Iraqi dinar cannot be trusted

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Chairman of the Jordan Money Exchangers Association Muta'i Kabariti warned Jordanians Wednesday from not to speculate on the Iraqi currency and said that such a step could bring losses to them.

Mr. Kabariti said the Iraqi dinar remains a currency that nobody could trust despite assurances by Iraq's Central Bank (ICB) governor who said

that the rate of Iraq's currency would improve following a recent deal with the United Nations.

Last February, the U.N. allowed Iraq to sell \$5.2 billion worth of oil in exchange of humanitarian purchases to its 22 million citizens in line with the 1996 oil-for-food agreement.

ICB Governor Issam Hweish told a weekly Iraqi magazine that his country had enough "foreign reserve" and it had succeeded in getting some of

its frozen assets abroad.

Mr. Hweish expected the Iraqi national currency to register noticeable gains in light of the increase in imports under the deal with the U.N.

"Iraq still faces financial difficulties as a result of lack of hard currency and I do not think that their agreement with the U.N. would make any change," Mr. Kabariti told the Jordan Times.

"Jordanians had a bad experience in holding and speculating on the Iraqi dinar. It is not wise to buy and trade with this currency at this time," he added.

Mr. Kabariti was referring to the losses incurred by Jordanians when they exchanged their savings with the previous Iraqi note hoping to record gains. The previous currency was cancelled by Baghdad following the 1990-91 Gulf crisis.

Mr. Kabariti estimated the losses then at between JD100

and JD150 million.

According to money changers in Amman, one million of the current Iraqi currency is equal to JD580.

The rate of the same amount of the cancelled Iraqi dinar, which had the picture of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein fixed on it, trades for JD13.500.

Despite the Iraqi government's decision to ban the circulation of the previous note, the cancelled currency are still used by the population in northern Iraq which is dominated by Kurds.

Mr. Kabariti emphasised that demand was recorded in the Iraqi currency following the statement of Mr. Hweish. He added that money changers in Amman do not have enough reserves of the Iraqi currency due to Iraqi government rules that bans the outflow of its currency.

To Let

Two-bedroom flat with living-dining room, kitchen, terrace, garden, car parking, central heating and phone. Situated at Shmeisani, close to Al Hussein Housing Corp. Estate.

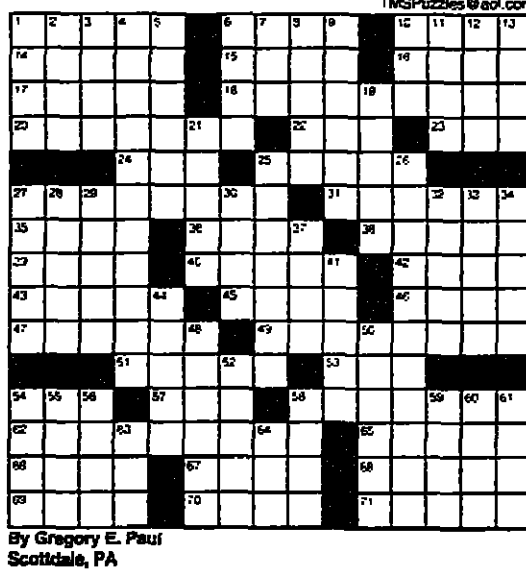
Interested please call 5536922

THE Daily Crossword

Edited by Wynne Robert Williams

ACROSS

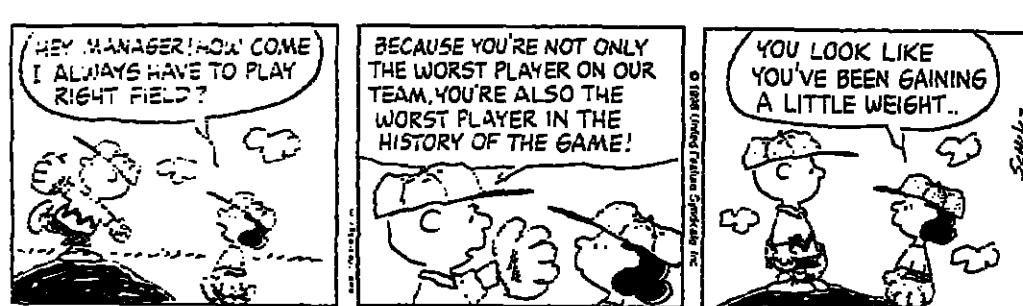
- 1 Adam's son and others
- 6 Spanish bull
- 10 Manipulated
- 14 "Alice" star
- 15 Uncouth
- 16 Entryway
- 17 Muse of poetry
- 18 Good dishes, perhaps
- 20 Nicaraguan group
- 22 Open-plan dining area
- 23 June honoree
- 24 Moon car, briefly
- 25 User oaths
- 27 Genetics subject
- 31 Has confidence in
- 35 Jal
- 36 Huff and puff
- 38 Broad tie
- 39 Jake's target
- 40 Group of eight
- 42 Trig function
- 43 Perfect
- 45 Roll-call call
- 46 Greek letter
- 47 Bank employee
- 49 Antifreeze ingredient
- 51 ... truly
- 53 Team cheer
- 54 Goal
- 55 Cagers' org.
- 56 Urn with a tap
- 58 Tasty three-sided seed
- 59 Playwright
- 60 Pirandello
- 61 Unconscious state
- 67 Beige
- 68 Mississippi quartet?
- 69 Metal fastener
- 70 Something we may bark
- 71 Play pranks



DOWN

- 1 Actor Guinness
- 2 Pressure: pref.
- 3 Novelist Cornell
- 4 New York ethnic neighborhood
- 5 Serenaded the
- 6 File markers
- 7 Now I see!
- 8 Extend a subscription
- 9 Egg dish
- 10 Uncouth grunt
- 11 Chimed in
- 12 Sicilian volcano
- 13 Deceased
- 14 Santa ... CA
- 15 Pomplona pal
- 16 Sets of principles
- 17 La Carne novel
- 18 Nail-biting or smoking, e.g.
- 19 Avoid
- 20 Indian badger
- 21 Dashboard gauge, for short
- 22 Hair
- 23 Kemo Sabe's friend
- 24 Baseball theft?
- 25 French lawyer
- 26 Par 3 club
- 27 Cass Elliot, e.g.
- 28 Daze
- 29 Passport stamp
- 30 Historic periods
- 31 Upstoke
- 32 Video-game shot
- 33 Mentalist Geller

Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n' Jeff



THE BETTER HALF

By Glasbergen



"People our age should eat more fish and fiber, but I refuse to try trout-flavored oatmeal."

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

DRAC

BYBOH

GURMOE

YOMARR

Print answer here: _____

Yesterday's Jumbles: WHILE CRAFT POLISH HYBRID FILTHY, RICH

Major Currencies & Cross

Currency	USD	DEM	GBP
Yen	1.8330	1.9384	1.2328
Mark	0.5287	1.0000	0.6366
Frank	1.5721	3.0997	1.9360
Franc	3.5523	120.83	5.3396
Yuan	0.0075	1.3381	0.4471
Dollar	0.7057	1.2965	0.4783
Lira	0.0025	1.0740	0.2277
Scudo	0.4788	88.89	0.2286
Drac	0.1609	0.2982	0.2962

Medium East

Currency	USD	JO	SAR
Yen	1.4104	0.7090	1.7367
Mark	0.2658	0.1590	0.2781
Frank	2.55	1.5806	5.9488
Yuan	0.2747	0.1947	0.2212
Dollar	0.2650	0.2370	0.2272
Lira	0.2722	0.1920	0.2272
Scudo	0.55	0.4642	0.4855
Drac	0.2926	0.2275	0.2973

Energy

Oil	Last	Review
WTI	13.81	13.93
Brent	14.52	15.71
WTI	13.81	13.93
WTI	13.81	13.93
WTI	13.81	13.93

Commodities

Commodity	Price	Change
Gold	300	300.5
Silver	6.41	6.44
Copper	408	410
Aluminum	1417	1420
Nickel	1730	1731
Zinc	1090	1096
Lead	575	576
Platinum	5530	5535

Main Equity Index

Index	Value	Change
DOW JONES	584.28	1.25
S&P 500	1023.79	1.25
FT-SE 100	6217.5	1.25
NIKKEI 225	12417.84	1.25
CAC 40	3583.3	1.25
DAX	574.21	1.25

Stocks

Stock	Price	Change
IBM	115.00	1.25
Microsoft	115.00	1.25
Apple	115.00	1.25
Oracle	115.00	1.25
Sun	115.00	1.25

Real Estate

Property	Price	Change
10000 sq.m.	115.00	1.25
20000 sq.m.	115.00	1.25
30000 sq.m.	115.00	1.25
40000 sq.m.	115.00	1.25
50000 sq.m.	115.00	1.25

Real Estate

Property	Price	Change
10000 sq.m.	115.00	1.25
20000 sq.m.	115.00	1.25
30000 sq.m.	115.00	1.25
40000 sq.m.	115.00	1.25
50000 sq.m.	115.00	1.25

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Arab Life & Accident Insurance Company to focus on outside markets

THE GENERAL assembly of the Arab Life & Accident Insurance Company has approved the recommendation of the board of directors to capitalise JD440,000 of retained earnings and authorised the board to take the necessary measures to raise the company's capital from JD2.2 million to JD2.64 million. Such an increase would translate into distributing free bonus shares at a rate of 20 per cent of the capital.

According to the annual report, the various insurance sections achieved a JD653,900 net profit last year compared to JD637,300 posted in 1996. But the "net technical profit" amounted to JD472,000 (JD477,000 in 1996), the report showed. The company also earned JD270,000 in return on investments, about the same amount earned in 1996. This brought up the net profit before various allocations to JD744,000 compared to JD749,000 posted in 1996.

The company has realised a total of JD8.7 million in insurance premiums in 1997, 12.3 per cent higher than the JD7.8 million total realised in the preceding year. The company's total investment amounted to JD4.4 million last year, slightly higher than the JD4.3 million total in 1996. Total assets increased from JD10.5 million to JD11.7 million of which JD4.5 million and JD5.7 million were current assets in 1996 and 1997 respectively.

Board Chairman Dirar Al Ghanem told the shareholders that insurance prices declined last year as a result of new companies trying to secure a suitable share of premiums and old companies trying to maintain its production level. "This situation caused prices to drop to 'non-technical' levels," he said, noting also that the recession at the Amman Financial market continued during 1997.

The chairman said the company is focusing on outside operations after having completed its network in the Palestinian territories by opening a branch in Nablus in addition to the one that was opened earlier in Ramallah. The company has also appointed agents in Gaza, Jericho, Hebron, Jenin and Tulkarem.

He indicated that the Arab Life & Accident Insurance Company has secured a suitable volume of work and an adequate income through buying equity in companies in Lebanon and Yemen. "As to operation in Riyadh, we are still waiting an improvement in employment requirements," Mr. Ghanem said.

Mr. Ghanem emphasised that the company will restructure its investments to generate higher return especially after the downward trend on bank interest on deposits and after introducing new insurance programmes (Al Ra'i + Al Dstour).

Marto expects new regulations to sharply boost share trading at Amman Financial Market

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The new regulations formulated by the Jordan Securities Commission (JSC) would enable investors to obtain any required information about the listed firms at the Amman Financial Market (AFM), JSC Chairman Michel Marto said Wednesday.

He indicated that the disclosure and transparency regulations (DTR), which will be published in the Official Gazette in the coming two weeks, are aimed at attracting more local and foreign investors to the stock exchange.

Dr. Marto said the new regulations will be effective by next September after a six-month period for the listed firms to prepare necessary information for the public.

"If these regulations are implemented, the trade volume in the stock exchange will be doubled and tripled," Dr. Marto told the Jordan Times.

The DTR require firms listed at the AFM to announce their net profits, revenues, and other details about the performance of the companies.

It also compels the firms to submit reports on a regular basis to the JSC about their status, financial results, ability to compete, future plans and the names of major shareholders.

In addition, the firms are required to submit half-yearly reports showing their balance sheets, profits or losses and any changes in the shareholders' rights in addition to other details.

The DTR also requires all concerned firms to apply international accounting standards in their financial operations.

Listed companies should notify the JSC about any change in their administration and the shares owned by members of the management. "This information will make things clear to the local and foreign investors," stressed

Dr. Marto who was the deputy governor of the Central Bank before he assumed his JSC post in 1997.

"It will encourage trading in the stock market through extending the necessary information for investors who, if they lack information, will undoubtedly hesitate to invest in the AFM," he explained.

"The details will enable any investor to get enough infor-

mation about the firm he intends to invest in," Dr. Marto said.

"I believe that the impact of the new regulations will be felt in the short, medium and long terms and also as soon as the regulations become effective," he added.

The JSC chief emphasised that many commercial banks, leading auditors, brokers, independent individuals and

others were consulted during the formulation of the regulations.

The 1997 figures showed that trading at the AFM increased by 42 per cent compared with the previous year as the total volume amounted to JD355 million, up from JD249 million.

The value of shares that were bought by non-Jordanian investors amounted to

JD100 million in the past year compared to JD26 million in 1996, with a net investment of JD57 million in 1997 compared with JD9 million in the previous year.

The AFM figures also showed that the bulk of these investments came from Arab investors who accounted for 72.2 per cent of the foreign investment in the stock exchange.

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET
HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - SHERIANI
TELEPHONE: 607171 / 607172
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR WEDNESDAY 01/04/1998

PART	12 MONTHS HIGH	12 MONTHS LOW	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DIV.	NO. OF SHARES	NO. OF TRANSACTIONS	VALUE TRADED	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE
346.000	250.000	234.000	ARAB BANK	13.7	1.20	6	340	113370	333.50	334.50	1.00+
2.340	1.660	1.540	JOR. NATIONAL BK.	4.3	0.00	5	7350	12226	1.66	1.67	0.01+
1.300	890	1.250	BANK OF JORDAN	62.4	0.00	1	250	238	92	95	0.03+
2.680	1.650	1.500	MID. EAST INV. BK.	9.0	8.06	12	20700	36128	1.73	1.75	0.02+
5.300	4.660	4.200	INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK.	31.1	1.87	18	13426	69737	1.15	1.16	0.01+
4.180	3.820	3.500	THE HOUSING BK.	9	0.00	6	977	1778	1.86	1.85	0.01-
1.400	1.200	1.100	JOR. KUNAFAT BANK	3.7	12.29	28	50363	30995	1.81	1.82	0.01+
1.400	1.200	1.100	JOR. GULF BANK	17.86	2	450	172	83	1.84	1.84	0.00
4.990	2.500	2.100	BEIT AL-KAL (BEITNA)	21.3	0.00	1	4000	11760	2.94	2.94	0.00
4.990	2.500	2.100	ARAB BANKING CO.	21.3	0.00	1	4000	11760	2.94	2.94	0.00

BANK SECTOR TOTALS		INDEX: 233.81		%CHG: +0.39		83	98300	277409		
2.400	1.590	JOR FRENCH INSP.	5.7	12.32	3	12100	24443	2.02	2.03	.01+
\$ 4.590	2.100	PHILADELPHIA INSP.	10.6	0.00	1	4000	8600	2.10	2.20	.10+

INSURANCE SECTOR TOTALS	INDEX: 122.04	%CHG: +0.05	4	16100	33243						
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2.140	1.550	JOR. ELECTRIC PWR.	10.1	4.76	21	18038	37969	2.08	2.10	.02+
4.030	1.320	IMBID ELECTRICITY	12.4	5.50	1	250	523	2.10	2.09	.01-
5.500	2.450	HIMEN MINERALS	46.9	0.00	1	100	429	4.52	4.29	.23-
1.550	.930	NATL. PORTFOLIO	40.7	0.00	15	17760	17760	1.00	1.00	0.00

INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS	INDEX: 108.71	%CHG: +0.37	230	186459	414648						
GRAND TOTAL	INDEX: 166.38	%CHG: +0.37	366	339747	785826						

PARALLEL MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR WEDNESDAY 01/04/1998											
530	340	JOR. TRADE FAC.	0.00	33	277450	108206	0.39	0.39	0.00		
900	480	NATL. COMMER. CENTERS	0.00	5	475	408	0.63	0.60	0.03-		
800	660	UNION INV. 501	0.00	10	45026	11255	0.74	0.75	0.01+		
1.000	720	ARAB FIN. INVEST.	0.00	10	15250	6458	0.42	0.43	0.01+		
		AL-STAND INV. CO.	0.00	2	1068	1067	1.00	1.00	0.00		

REUTERS The Business of Information

Currency	USD	JOD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	1.6530	0.5981	1.5330	133.63	1.4170	1627.40	2.0887	6.2135		
DE Mark	0.5987	0.3224	0.8272	72.09	0.7643	985.71	1.1270	3.3528		
GB Sterling	1.6721	3.0997	2.5833	223.48	2.3694	3055.78	3.4927	10.3902		
CH Franc	0.8523	1.2050	0.3896	87.14	0.9237	1191.34	136.17	4.0508		
JP Yen	0.0075	1.3861	0.4471	1.1468	1.0500	13.67	156.25	4.6480		
CA Dollar	0.7057	1.2965	0.4183	1.0669	1.06	1278.48	1.4612	4.3439		
IT Lira	0.0005	1.0140	0.3271	0.0839	1388.83	0.7764	11.43	3.3980		
NL Guilder	0.4785	0.8849	0.2891	73.40	63.93	0.6763	874.55	2.9722		
FR Franc	0.1605	0.2583	0.0882	24.6800	21.50	0.2281	33.63	33.6300		

Currency	USD	JOD	SAR	BAH	QAT	KUW	AED	LBP	EGP
US Dollar	0.7050	3.7607	0.5770	3.6408	0.3060	3.6728	1527.50	3.4175	
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	5.2901	0.5317	5.1351	0.4316	5.1803	2154.44	4.8202	
Saudi Riyal	0.2696	0.1890	0.1005	0.97	0.0816	0.98	407.26	0.9112	
Bahrain Dinar	2.85	1.8806	0.9488	9.88	0.8117	9.74	4081.72	0.9650	
Qatar Dinar	0.2747	1.0947	1.0302	1.0840	1.01	419.55	0.9387		
Kuwait Dinar	3.2680	2.3170	1.2572	1.2320	11.90	12.00	4991.83	0.9387	
Emirate Dinar	0.2723	0.1930	1.0312	1.0268	0.9913	0.8833	415.90	0.9305	
Lebanese/1000	0.65	0.4642	2.4555	0.3468	2.3835	0.2003	2.4045	2.2373	
Egyptian	0.2926	0.2075	1.0575	0.1103	1.0653	0.0895	1.0747	446.96	

Oil	Last	Review
Brent	13.81	13.93
W. Texas	15.62	15.71
Bonny	13.81	13.93
Dubai	12.07	11.89
UL Gas	162.00	154.00

Metal	Bid	Offer
Gold (oz's)	300	300.5
Silver (oz's)	6.41	6.44
Platinum (oz's)	408	410
AL (3 Months)	1417	1420
CU (3 Months)	1730	1731
Zinc (3 Months)	1090	1095
Lead (3 Months)	575	576
NI (3 Months)	5630	5635

Bourse	Index	Value	Chng	% Chng	High	Low	Pr Cls
New York	DOW JONES	8154.21	81.26	1.02	8154.21	8083.24	8102.35
New York	S&P 500	1103.75	2	0.18	1103.75	1085.29	1101.75
London	FT-SE 100	6017.6	86.4	1.44	6030.7	5907.1	5932.2
Tokyo	NIKKEI 225	16241.86	-285.61	-1.73	16440.8	16147.8	16227.2
Paris	CAC 40	3883.31	7.5	0.19	3911.89	3885.18	3875.81
Frankfurt	DAX	6154.21	81.26	1.02	6154.21	6083.24	6

First Division Basketball Championship

Hussein play deciding match tonight

Jazireh, Orthodoxi clash Friday

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Crucial matches are lined up for the weekend with teams having very different targets in their fight for victories.

Al Hussein host Al Jeel in Irbid Thursday with their place in the six-team prestigious First Division Basketball Championship at stake.

The Irbid team is still winless and their only chance of avoiding relegation is to score outright wins over Al Jeel and Al Jalil whereby they will tie both teams in overall points and have a chance to stay depending on score difference.

Al Jeel beat Al Hussein 76-67 in their first round encounter and also beat Al Jalil 61-60.

However, calculations were complicated when Al Jalil avenged their defeat by scoring a 75-50 win over Al Jeel in the second round, thus making it a three-way

race to avoid the relegation-threatened last place.

In Thursday's second match, Al Ahli are expected to beat Al Jalil.

However, it is Friday's Al Jazireh-Al Orthodoxi fight for the lead that fans are anticipating this weekend. Al Jazireh top the standings and are the only unbeaten team so far. They beat Al Orthodoxi 92-84 and Al Ahli 75-69 in the first round and seem poised to repeat the same.

Regardless of their results in the two rounds, the top three teams will have a shot at the title with introduction of the playoff system this year.

Last year's runners up Al Ahli seem to have the least chance after an inconsistent form and their latest 69-37 loss to Al Orthodoxi who had also won 74-49 in the first round.

Al Ahli came in second last year and were busier tackling technical obstacles like recruiting a coach and luring back veterans Yousef Zaghoul and Marwan Ma'touq to the lineup after missing a season.

Their inadequate preparation is now taking its toll despite the efforts of Faisal Nsour and Yousef Zaghoul to score and improve the team's results.

Al Orthodoxi ended up in

third place last year and are in better shape to resume their dominance of the game. Their younger lineup, led by Fadi Saqqa, Ayman Du'eis and Nasser Bassam, has assumed command and are in a situation to give Al Jazireh a hard time in the fight for the title.

Al Jazireh ended a 30-year domination among the two rivals last season. Prior to that Al Orthodoxi had an undisputed reign from 1976-1989, but Al Ahli won the title in 1990, 1992, 1993 and 1994 aided by the signing of Naser Bushnaq.

Al Orthodoxi came back to win in 1991, 1995 and 1996.

STANDINGS

Team	P	W	L	St	Sa	Pts
Jazireh	8	8	-	764	456	16
Orthodoxi	8	7	1	681	417	15
Ahli	8	5	3	532	467	13
Jalil	8	2	6	437	579	10
Jeel	8	2	6	439	686	10
Hussein	8	-	8	423	569	8

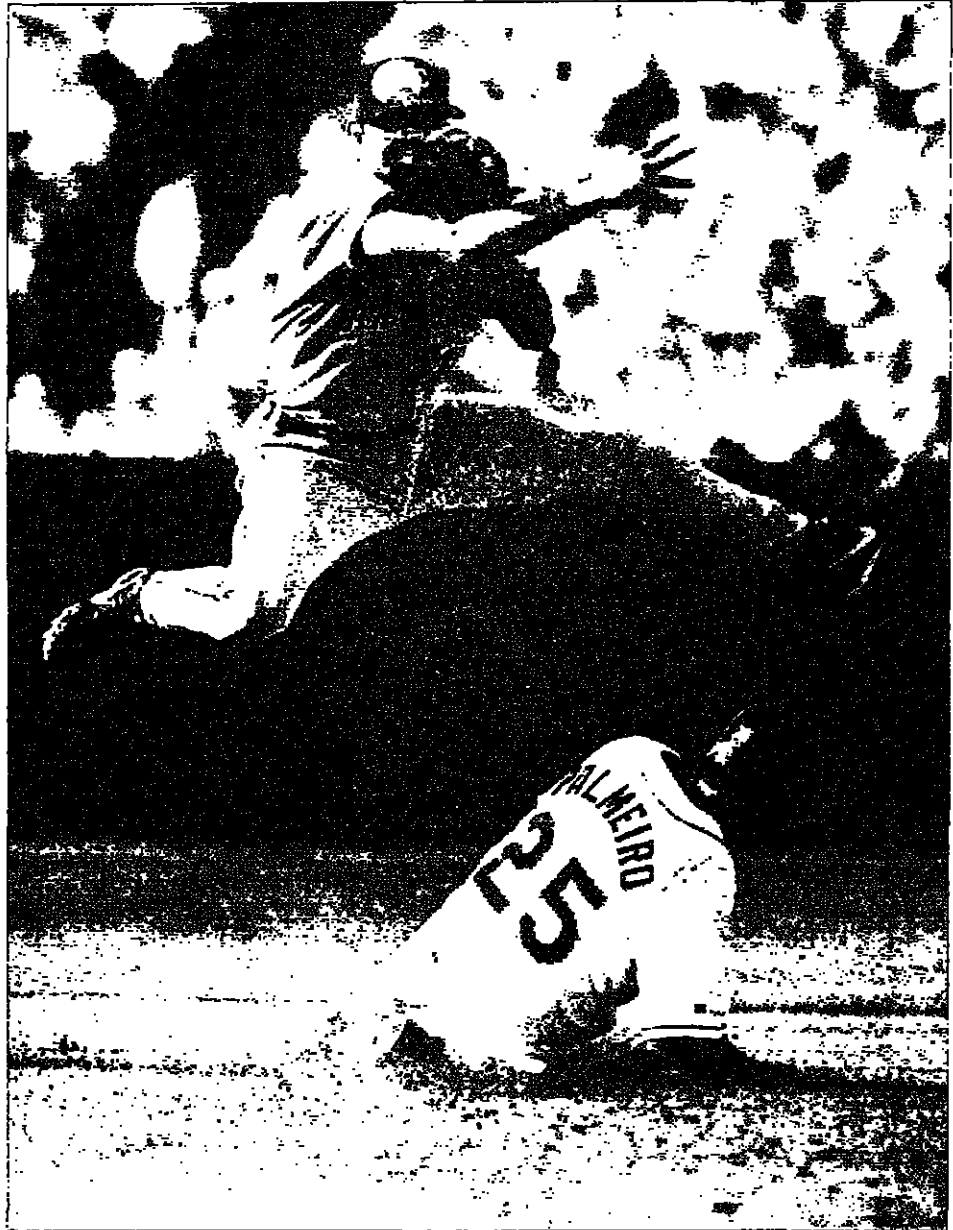
Major League season under way

NEW YORK (AFP) — Mark Lewis of the Philadelphia Phillies singled against Bobby Jones of the New York Mets to record the first hit of the 1998 Major League baseball season on Tuesday at Shea Stadium.

Baseball expands to 30 teams with the addition of the Arizona Diamondbacks and the Tampa Bay Devil Rays, and each new team will host its inaugural game Tuesday.

The Diamondbacks will entertain the Colorado Rockies in a National League game at Bank One Ballpark, baseball's first-ever facility featuring both a retractable dome and natural grass. The Devil Rays welcome the Detroit Tigers in an American League game at Tropicana Field, a conventional dome.

The Diamondbacks and Devil Rays each spent freely on veteran talent, so their players will be more familiar to the average fan than will the world champions Florida Marlins, who were dismantled by owner Wayne Huizenga following their World Series win. The Marlins host the Chicago Cubs.



Kansas City Royals shortstop Felix Martinez leaps over the slide of Baltimore Orioles Rafael Palmeiro, after forcing him out in the second inning at Camden Yards. Martinez' throw to first was in time to complete a double play on B.J. Surhoff (Reuters photo)

Crucial match for Stuttgart coach in today's European Cup Winners' Cup semifinals

STUTTGART (AFP) — The future of VfB Stuttgart coach Joachim Loew may be riding on the outcome of Thursday's European Cup Winners' Cup semi-final, first leg match against Lokomotiv Moscow.

Loew's authority has been steadily undermined since the end of last year, when Stuttgart's form began to dive.

A win against Lokomotiv would turn down the heat a fraction, but rumours has it that regardless of how Stuttgart finish the season, Loew will be sacked sooner rather than later.

His style of easygoing management has been considered responsible for the team breaking down into rival cliques.

Loew's quiet manner relies on individual players taking responsibility for their own conduct both on and off the

field — but this trust has been abused often, to the detriment of the entire team.

Stuttgart are hoping strikers Fredi Bobic and Jonathan Akpoborie will be fit for both Thursday's match and the weekend Bundesliga meeting with Cologne.

Bobic had a dislocated shoulder, while Akpoborie has been a long-term absentee with torn knee ligaments. Both took part in training again for the first time on Monday and the temptation will be strong to rush them back into the side.

Midfield magician Krassimir Balakov, whose two spectacular goals from free kicks against Slavia Prague in the quarter-finals took Stuttgart through, resumed training on Tuesday after being sidelined by a knee prob-

lem. He is also hopeful of starting against the Russians.

Definitely missing, though, will be Swiss defender Murat Yakin, who is both injured and suspended. Captain Frank Verlaet has sore ribs from Saturday's 3-0 caning by Hertha Berlin but still wants to play after x-rays dispelled fears of a break.

Lokomotiv go into the game buoyed by a victory in the opening game of the new Russian season.

After their victorious return quarter-final match against AEK Athens, Lokomotiv have beaten Torpedo Moscow 2-0 in the Russian Cup and then downed Tyumen 4-0 in their league opener.

Midfielder Dmitry Loskov will miss the first-leg match because of a hip injury.

Asprilla may miss World Cup

BOGOTA (AFP) — Parma's Colombian striker Faustino Asprilla faces missing the World Cup finals through injury, the president of the Colombian Football Federation (FCF) revealed here late Tuesday.

FCF president Alvaro FINA said he feared the former Newcastle star, who rejoined Italian Serie A outfit Parma in January for \$10.8 million, would not fully recover from a leg muscle injury in time for the June finals.

"I fear he will not be able to get back to full fitness for the World Cup", FINA told AFP.

The rumour mill has been spinning overtime in Colombia following reports from Italy that Parma believe the 28-year-old, nicknamed "Tino", will be out of action for at least five weeks.

That will hit Parma's hopes of a UEFA Cup spot in the Serie A but could also spell doom for Colombia, who face England, Romania and Tunisia in Group G of the World Cup.

Asprilla, who has hit 15 goals in 39 international appearances, aggravated the injury in recent friendlies in Bogota against Argentine club side Boca Juniors and fellow World Cup finalists Yugoslavia.

Colombian media reports suggested that if "Tino" is ruled out of the World Cup, his place will go to former Bayern Munich striker Adolfo Valencia, 30, who has been in fine form this season for Independiente Medellin.

Although Valencia fell out with coach Herman Dario Gomez during the last World Cup and was subsequently dropped, Gomez has since indicated he will call on the burly forward for the April 22 clash with Chile in Santiago.

Nigeria finalises World Cup preparations

LAGOS (AFP) — World Cup qualifiers Nigeria will start their final preparations for the competition, which starts in Paris on June 10, with a month long stay at a warm-up camp in Europe their coach Bora Milutinovic said here on Tuesday.

Milutinovic, who joined Nigeria after being sacked by Mexico despite them qualifying top of the CONCACAF World Cup qualifying group, arrived back in Nigeria on Sunday after a three-month tour of Europe monitoring the performances of Nigeria's hopefuls for France '98.

It is believed that the Serbian coach will choose between Zurich and Paris as the training camp for the Eagles who are in Group D alongside Spain, Bulgaria and Paraguay in the first round of the World Cup.

Milutinovic, who coached Mexico in an earlier stint to the '86 quarter-finals, Costa Rica to the last 16 in '90 and the United States to the last 16 in '94, also said that he will be returning to Europe in a fortnight to monitor the performances of two strikers — Dele Adebola of English First Division side Birmingham City and Kenneth Zeigbo of Polish outfit Legia Warsaw.



Chicago Bulls' Michael Jordan gets by Detroit Pistons' Brian Williams for a dunk during the second quarter of their NBA game at the United Center (Reuters photo)

Sonics beat Jazz; Knicks lose

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Two days after setting an NBA record for futility, the Indiana Pacers set a club record with 14 3-pointers — six by Chris Mullin — as they defeated the Los Angeles Clippers 128-106 on Tuesday.

In beating the Clippers for the 11th consecutive time, the Pacers hit 11 of their first 14 shots, including 3-of-3 on 3-pointers, to take command from the start.

Mullin led Indiana with 24 points, and was 6-of-6 from 3-point range. Reggie Miller, who returned after a one-game suspension, and Antonio Davis, playing for the injured Rick Smith, added 19 points apiece. Mark Jackson added 11 points and 15 assists in 26 minutes as reserves played the fourth quarter.

Lakers 114, Raptors 105: In Toronto, Rick Fox had 31 points and 10 rebounds as the Lakers won for the 13th time in their last 15 games.

Shaquille O'Neal added 20 points and 13 rebounds for the Lakers, while Chauncey Billups had 21 for the Raptors, who lost their sixth straight game.

Kobe Bryant had 17 points for the Lakers before leaving the game early in the fourth quarter with a hip injury.

Spurs 95, Knicks 78: In New York, Tim Duncan scored 25 points and David Robinson had 24 as San Antonio overpowered New York.

The Spurs outscored the Knicks 36-22 in 17 minutes. Allan Houston led the Knicks with 31 points.

Nets 105, Hawks 90: In East Rutherford, New Jersey, Keith Van Horn scored 19 of his 22 points in the first quarter and Kerry Kittles kept New Jersey in front after Atlanta made a fourth-quarter run.

Kittles scored nine of his 18 points in a 16-2 spurt that gave the Nets a 91-75 lead.

The Nets moved a half game ahead of Orlando in the fight for the eighth playoff berth in the East.

It was the Nets' first game since All-Star center Jayson Williams broke his right thumb, while Atlanta was without its two leading scorers, Steve Smith and Christian Laettner.

Cavaliers 93, Magic 86: In Cleveland, there must be hard feelings between the Magic and Cavaliers when Mark Price gets into a fight and is booed in Cleveland.

Bob Sura had 21 points as Cleveland beat Orlando in a rough game that included Price's scuffle with Vitaly Potapenko.

The Cavs, in sixth place in the Eastern Conference, won for the eighth time in nine games, and put another damper on Orlando's playoff hopes.

Shawn Kemp had 13 points and 16 rebounds, and Wesley Person scored 16. Sura, a 53-per cent foul shooter, was 9-for-9 from the line.

Heat 121, Celtics 95: In Miami, the Heat won the game, but lost center Alonzo Mourning with a broken left cheekbone.

The center faced surgery Tuesday and his status was uncertain, the team said.

Mourning, who averages 19.2 points and 9.7 rebounds, was injured during a scrap for a loose ball with 10:07 left in the third quarter when he collided with Boston's Andrew DeClercq.

Voshon Lenard had 26 points and Dan Majerle 16 to pace Miami, which shot 59 per cent and made 11-of-19 3-pointers in winning for the 25th time in 29 games.

Hornets 101, 76ers 93: In Charlotte, North Carolina, Glen Rice scored 26 points and David Wesley's 15-foot (4.5 metre) jumper broke a tie late in the fourth quarter for Charlotte.

The Hornets blew a 20-

point first quarter lead and trailed 81-76 with 9:24 left before regrouping to hold off the 76ers and end a two-game losing streak.

SuperSonics 88, Jazz 86: In Seattle, Detlef Schrempf scored 17 points and hit the go-ahead basket as Seattle rallied to beat Utah in a battle of the top teams in the Western Conference.

The victory put Seattle (54-18) one-half game ahead of Utah (53-18) in the race for best record in the Western Conference.

The Sonics split the season series and snapped Utah's three-game winning streak at Key Arena.

John Stockton missed a 17-foot (5 metre) jumper at the buzzer as the Sonics handed the Jazz just their third loss in 25 games since the All-Star break.

Mavericks 104, Grizzlies 101: In Vancouver, British Columbia, A.C. Green and Michael Finley scored 22 points apiece and Erick Strickland made a key steal in the final seconds for Dallas.

The Grizzlies, trying to come back from a 13-point fourth-quarter deficit, trailed 100-98 with 20 seconds left. But Strickland batted the ball out of the hands of Shareef

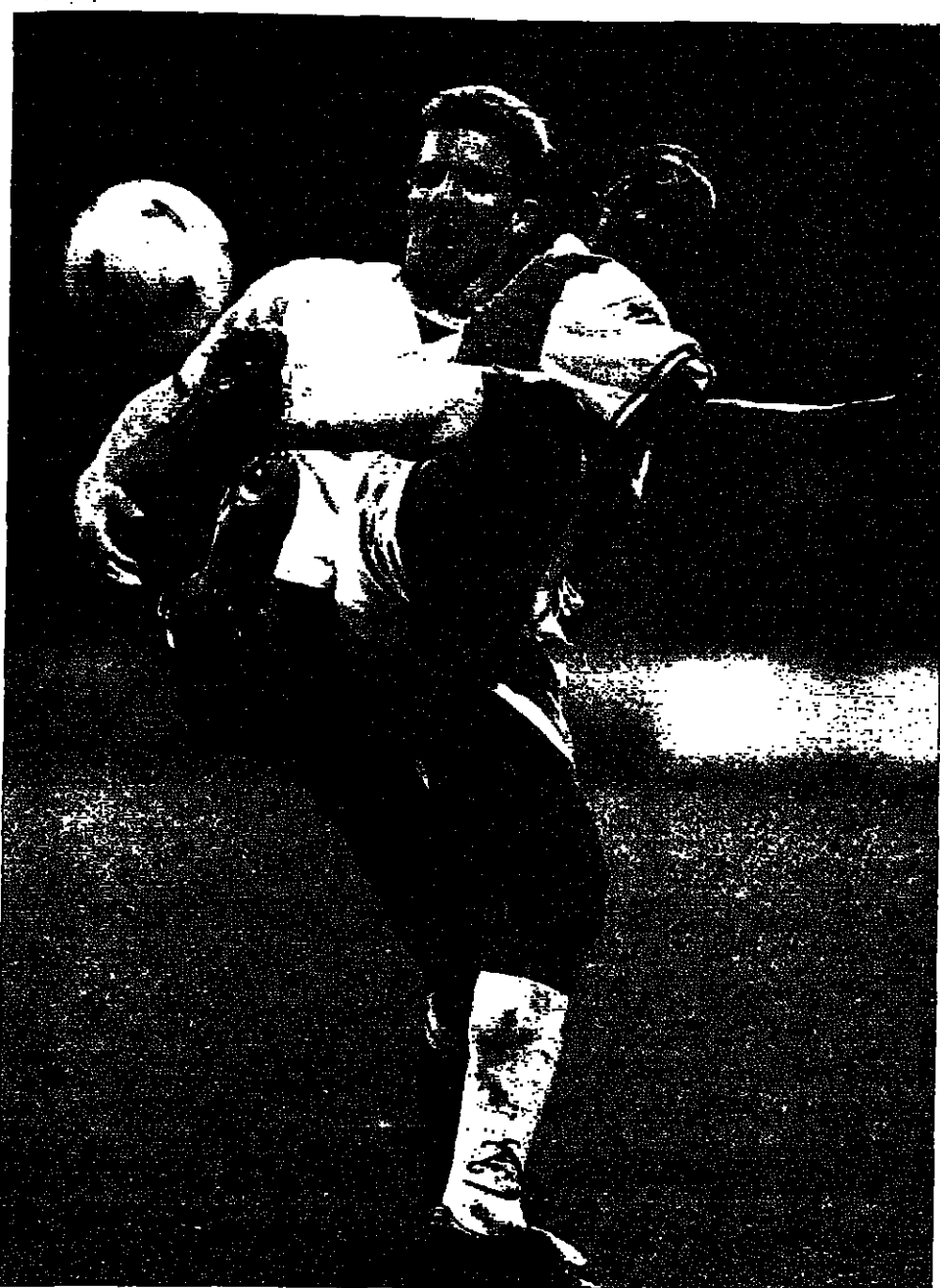
Bucks 94, Warriors 89 OT: In Oakland, California, Armon Gilliam scored 29 points, including eight in overtime, and Milwaukee ended its nine-game road losing streak.

Ray Allen added 24 points and Ervin Johnson had 17 for Milwaukee, which has been playing without injured starters Tyrone Hill (back strain), Glenn Robinson (left knee) and Terrell Brandon (left ankle sprain).

It was just the third win in the past 18 games for the Bucks, who swept their two-game season series with the Warriors.

Tony Delk's 23 points led the Warriors.

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Arsenal goalscorer Christopher Wreh (R) is tackled by Bolton Wanderers Icelandic player Gudni Bergsson. Arsenal beat Bolton Wanderers 1-0 in the Premiership game on Wednesday at the Reebok stadium (Reuters photo)

Asian, world coaches to help China boost standards

BEIJING (AFP) — International football's governing body, FIFA, and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) are joining hands to boost China's football standards after the giant nation failed to qualify for the World Cup, the China Daily reported Wednesday.

"I'm as sad as you are that the Chinese national football team has not achieved what we expected," Peter Velappan, AFC secretary-general told the newspaper.

"The Chinese Football Association is asking why, the AFC is asking why and FIFA is asking why," he added.

Under the new programme, Valappan said promising players and coaches will be targeted for special training.

"The first target is the education and training of coaches... Our second task is to re-train qualified coaches with knowledge of modern trends... and our third target is to attract promising players aged 12 to 20 and put them under the care of the coaches," he said.

"The AFC and FIFA really want China to make big progress in soccer to match the world standard," he added.

The coach training programme will be supervised by senior FIFA instructor Detmar Cramer, the newspaper said, adding that Adidas would sponsor the scheme.

French put final touches to World Cup security jigsaw

PARIS (AFP) — French Interior Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement said Wednesday he was confident the authorities would be able to ensure public security during the World Cup, which France hosts this summer.

In a statement, Chevènement said no stone would be left unturned in efforts to ensure the tournament passes off peacefully amid effective, but not intrusive, security.

He revealed that 60 mobile units of regular police and their CRS state security police cousins would be on standby "round the clock" at the ten venues hosting a total of 64 matches across the country between June 10

and July 12. The units will serve as back-up to local law-enforcers.

Chevènement added that the security forces will liaise closely with their foreign counterparts to ensure the event takes place without a hitch.

Mixed police units, including officers from countries involved in a particular match, will be on duty to monitor groups of fans identified as a potential security threat.

In addition, private security officials recruited and trained by the World Cup organising committee will shepherd supporters in and out of venues, while closed-circuit cameras will help pinpoint potential troublemakers.

Crack police squads will be responsible for the protection of the teams and their officials.

But the French have still to allay fears that a severe shortage of tickets will not lead to chaos as tens of thousands of ticketless fans descend on the country.

Several countries, including England, Holland and Belgium, have complained that their allocation is far too small with many tickets reserved either for French residents or sponsors.

National federations of the competing countries have received less than one fifth of the total.

Inter and Lazio close in on all-Italian UEFA Cup final

PARIS (AFP) — Inter Milan and Lazio both scored victories on Tuesday night to set up a likely all-Italian final in the UEFA Cup.

Brazilian midfielder Ze Elias scored a dramatic late winner for Inter as they beat Spartak Moscow 2-1 at home, while Lazio won 1-0 away to Atletico Madrid to boost their chances.

If both progress after the second legs matches in two weeks' time they would meet in the fourth all-Italian final in nine years.

Inter dominated from start to finish but looked to have thrown the semi-final away when Spartak skipper Dmitri Alenichev prodded in a 48th-minute equaliser, cancelling out Chilean Ivan Zamorano's first-half goal.

Inter piled on the pressure, however, and were finally rewarded in the last 60 seconds when Ze Elias, hero of the night after setting up Zamorano's goal, knocked the ball home in a goalmouth melee.

The strike could be enough to take Inter back to the final, after they lost on penalties to German side Schalke 04 last season.

But the second leg in Moscow in a fortnight's time will be no picnic for Gigi Simoni's side, who

were left to rue a host of missed opportunities.

It looked as though Inter were destined never to score until Zamorano rose majestically to head in Ze Elias' curling free-kick, literally seconds before the break.

Inter started the second half where they left off the first, but were rocked after just three minutes.

Alenichev breached Inter's defence with a fine dummy on the left and raced through before prodding the ball against the bottom of the near post, sending it spinning across the line.

Ze Elias' late winner then sent the 57,000 crowd at San Siro into raptures.

In Madrid, in contrast, the fans had little to smile about as Raddy Antic's men played with little drive or enthusiasm.

Yugoslav international midfielder Vladimir Jugovic scored with a long-range shot to give Lazio their win — a victory that extended the Rome club's unbeaten record to 24 matches stretching back to last November.

Lazio, who have never won a European trophy, scored the only goal in the 34th minute when Jugovic found the net with a right-foot shot from outside the penalty area after a clever

build-up in which Croatian Alen Boksic provided the decisive pass.

Boksic and skipper Diego Fuser were the key men in Lazio's triumph as they ran the Atletico defence ragged.

With the Atletico back four pulled this way and that, the Spanish club were rarely able to mount cohesive attacks.

The home loss was a bitter blow for Atletico, who are bidding for their first European trophy since they won the Cup Winners' Cup back in 1962.

Club president Jesus Gil y Gil was so enthused by the game that he defied a UEFA ban that should have kept him out of the stadium and took his place in the grandstand.

Lazio, currently third in the Italian League, were clearly the better side, playing with great discipline as they shut out the solo attacking threat of Atletico's Italian international striker Christian Vieri.

Wishful thinking for Portuguese

LISBON (AFP) — If only it were true, sighed millions of Portuguese football fans on Wednesday as they almost fell victim to an April Fools day joke.

Local broadcaster Radio Paris Lisbon announced that Iran had decided not to compete at the World Cup "for security reasons" and that FIFA had designated Portugal as their replacement.

The station even broadcast spoof "declarations" in English from FIFA President Joao Havelange "confirming" the story.

But while the Iranians gleefully prepare to pack their bags after ending Australia's hopes, the Portuguese, who failed to qualify, can only reflect on what might have been.

Ten-man Arsenal turn up the heat on United

LONDON (AFP) — A stunning goal by Christopher Wreh, cousin of AC Milan star George Weah, fired Arsenal to a crucial 1-0 win over struggling Bolton on Tuesday to keep alive the Londoners' hopes of winning the "Double".

Arsene Wenger's cosmopolitan side, who stretched their unbeaten run to 12 games, are now just three points behind leaders and reigning champions Manchester United with two games in hand.

The Gunners' title odds were immediately slashed by leading bookmakers Ladbrokes to 11-8 from 2-1 while United, who were 1-3 favourites, offered at 1-2 with third-placed Liverpool way out at 40-1.

Relegation-haunted Bolton dominated the north Londoners for the first half an hour, but failed to convert their superiority into goals.

Midfielder Alan Thompson came close to beating David Seaman with a 25-yard free kick which the England goalkeeper failed to hold before Martin Keown scrambled the ball clear.

French striker Nicolas Anelka missed two chances but Arsenal came into their own in the final 15 minutes of the half as Thompson's miss looked like proving costly.

And so it proved two minutes into the second period when the 22-year-old Wreh fired the Gunners into the lead with a superb strike.

Frenchman Emmanuel Petit stabbed a pass through to the Liberian who spun on the edge of the box and hammered a right-foot shot into the roof of Keith Branagan's net for his second goal of the season.

The balance of power swung Bolton's way when Keown was given his marching orders for a second bookable offence on 65 minutes for bringing down Nathan Blake a yard outside the box.

Arsenal, who face Wolves in the FA Cup semi-final on Sunday, showed all their famous defensive grit by hanging on without serious alarm for three vital points to turn the screw on United.

Newcastle demonstrated why they are in the midst of a desperate relegation dogfight when they were held to a goalless draw away to fellow strugglers

Wimbledon. Kenny Dalglish's side, who remain in 15th place, four points clear of the relegation zone and without a League win for two months, failed to register a single shot on target in the first half.

Dalglish had made six changes to the side who lost 2-1 at Southampton three days ago in a bid to shake his team out of their relegation form, but there was little improvement in their game.

Blackburn Rovers, who had won only two of their previous 10 Premiership matches, restored their hopes of a place in next

season's UEFA Cup with a 2-1 home win over struggling Bolton.

The victory sees Rovers move up two places over Chelsea and Leeds into fourth position.

Sweden international Martin Dahlin grabbed an early goal before substitute Kevin Gallacher grabbed the winner three minutes from time after Macedonian ace Georgi Hristov had equalised for the visitors.

But there was a blow for Blackburn when England goalkeeper Tim Flowers left the field with a shoulder injury in the second half.

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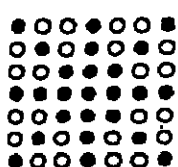


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'Iraq palace inspections achieved objective'

BAGHDAD (AP) — The first visits to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's palaces by U.N. arms experts have achieved their objective of mapping the compounds, the head of the diplomatic corps monitoring the inspections said Wednesday.

On Tuesday, a small group of experts made second visits to three palaces — one in Baghdad and two in the north — to clarify some problems, Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala said. He said this was only to tie up loose ends and complete unfinished survey work.

The inspectors now need to see two more palaces in Baghdad before wrapping up their mission by this weekend.

Mr. Dhanapala said. He refused to be more specific. Iraq opened up the eight presidential sites to U.N. arms experts on the condition that they would be accompanied by a group of diplomats who will safeguard the dignity of the palaces and national sovereignty.

This condition was formalised in a Feb. 23 accord that Iraq signed with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, ending a five-month standoff that was edging toward war. At that time, the United States was threatening to attack Iraq if it did not give full and free access to U.N. inspectors in their search for Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Iraq has said it has long dismantled or destroyed its programmes to build long-range missiles and chemical and biological weapons.

Even if any incriminating evidence existed in the palaces, Iraq has had enough time to remove it between Feb. 23 and last Thursday, when the first presidential site was inspected. Mr. Dhanapala said it was incorrect to say that this made the inspections purely symbolic.

"There is a great deal of technical work that has been done on these visits," he said. The visits were only to conduct surveys, he said, and the arms experts have "accomplished the purpose for which the initial visits were intended."

Netanyahu hopeful he can seal any peace deal by year 2000

CHICAGO (AFP) — Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu voiced confidence in a interview published Wednesday that he would seal a peace deal with the Palestinians, Lebanon or Syria by the end of his term in office in the year 2000.

"I intend to do it in this term, at least one of these agreements," he said in an interview with the Chicago Tribune from occupied Jerusalem.

But he reiterated his opposition to creation of an independent Palestinian state with unlimited powers or "unbridled self-determination" and flatly ruled out a returning to Israel's pre-1967 borders.

He played down fears that right-wing members of his Likud-led coalition government might desert him if he hands over too much land to the Palestinians in a peace agreement.

"I have to be satisfied that the Palestinians do their part and I have to be satisfied that I protect Israel's security," he said. "If I'm satisfied that these two concerns are met, then the coalition concerns are not going to be in the way."

Mr. Netanyahu again shot down a U.S. plan that reportedly calls for an Israeli troop pullback from 13.1 per cent of the West Bank, saying he would consider giving up no more than nine per cent for now.

"For us, every kilometre makes a difference. Every hill-top makes a difference... and a per cent here is [an area] the size of Tel Aviv," he noted.

He also blamed the current peace stalemate on Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, saying he had failed to keep his commitments to fight terror and

those who incite it.

"We gave up land. We got nothing. We want something," the Israeli prime minister said. "Arafat has not fought terror. He has not dismantled the terrorist infrastructure."

Mr. Netanyahu also dismissed suggestions that the latest mediation effort by U.S. special Middle East coordinator Dennis Ross had been a failure and that Washington might give up its peacemaking role.

He said Mr. Ross and Israeli officials raised "some interesting bridging ideas" for the parties to consider before they meet again. "I certainly think there's a possibility of a further narrowing of the gaps."

He pointed out that despite disagreements with Washington, "We're good friends. We're solid allies."

Slim majority of Israelis support Netanyahu on West Bank pullout

TEL AVIV (AFP) — A slim plurality of Israeli Jews support Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's rejection of U.S. proposals for Israel to withdraw from 13 per cent of the West Bank, according to a poll published Wednesday.

The survey by the Gallup organisation found that 48 per cent of those queried agreed with Mr. Netanyahu's view that a 13 per cent pullback would endanger Israel's interests.

Forty-three per cent said Mr. Netanyahu should have agreed to the 13 per cent withdrawal which was reportedly presented to Israelis and Palestinians over the weekend by U.S. special envoy Dennis Ross.

Mr. Ross returned home Monday after failing to obtain agreement on U.S. proposals to break the more than year-long stalemate in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

When asked if they believed Mr. Netanyahu's obstinance in the negotiations would eventually lead to a peace accord with the Palestinians, 48 per cent said yes while 42 per cent thought the result would be a breakdown in the peace process.

Mr. Netanyahu's government

has publicly refused to yield more than an additional nine per cent of the West Bank at this stage and has linked any troop withdrawal to the Palestinians meeting a series of demands, mostly concerning action against armed militant groups.

Far-right nationalists in Mr. Netanyahu's coalition have vowed to topple the government if he bends to U.S. pressure and increases his pullback offer.

Jewish settlers and other nationalist groups were due to hold demonstrations at intersections around Israel Wednesday as a warning to Mr. Netanyahu not to hand over too much territory to the Palestinians.

But the Yediot Aharonot newspaper quoted Mr. Netanyahu Wednesday as saying that if the Palestinians honour their security commitments he is willing to confront his own right-wing to reach a withdrawal deal.

"I'll present the coalition with a fait accompli and I'd like to see what they'll do," he told the newspaper.

Mr. Netanyahu denied on Tuesday that Mr. Ross' mission had been a failure despite the

lack of a breakthrough and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright agreed that "some progress" had been achieved.

Mr. Netanyahu said he expected Mr. Ross to return soon to discuss "bridging ideas" which had been raised during his earlier mission.

One of the bridging ideas was Mr. Netanyahu's willingness to discuss a further troop withdrawal later this year once agreement is reached on the pullback currently being discussed.

Mr. Netanyahu had previously insisted his government would carry out only one troop pullback prior to a final peace agreement with the Palestinians, rather than three separate withdrawals called for under interim peace accords.

But Monday he proposed setting up a joint committee with the Palestinians to discuss the possibility of one further withdrawal.

The Gallup poll, published in the Maariv newspaper, was conducted among 500 Israeli Jews, excluding Arabs who make up nearly 20 per cent of the population. The margin of error was 4.5 per cent.



APRIL FOOL: The press release said that a 747-jumbo would be flying under the Sydney Harbour Bridge. When AP photographer Rick Rycroft arrived to record the scene he saw a jumbo made of 45 plywood sheets sitting on a barge, and sure enough flying under the harbour bridge. The replica 747 was built by students at the University of Sydney Department of Aeronautical (AP photo)

Algeria more flexible on violence investigations — U.N. rapporteur

GENEVA (AFP) — Algeria appears to have adopted a more flexible line towards pressure for international investigation of massacres of its people by offering to let a U.N. investigator on religious intolerance visit the country, the official said Wednesday.

United Nations rapporteur Abdelhafid Amor, a Tunisian, said he was "intrigued" by Algeria's apparently greater flexibility, and may visit Algeria if the invitation is confirmed.

Algeria has hitherto opposed visits by special U.N. rapporteurs on summary executions and torture to conduct investigations into massacres of civilians attributed to Islamic extremists.

It insists the country's major problem is not one of violations of human rights by security forces, but of Islamist terrorism which is an internal matter.

But there have been suspicions voiced in Western countries that some of the murders have been the work, not of Islamists, but of government troops trying to discredit the Islamists.

The United States last week said it was considering putting a resolution to the U.N. Human Rights Commission to get Algerian authorities to grant visits by three U.N. rapporteurs on torture, summary executions and violence against women.

In granting a visit by the U.N. rapporteur on religious

intolerance, Algeria may be hoping to see its version of the causes of the violence reinforced while simultaneously appeasing pressure for an international enquiry.

The Algerian government has said some 26,000 people have died in the conflict, but the U.S. State Department and human rights groups put the death toll at 70,000.

Speaking to journalists Mr. Amor said of the extremists: "When people who believe themselves to be in possession of the absolute truth think they can share this truth with others by cutting their throats then you have a human rights problem that cannot be overlooked."

Liberte and La Tribune on Wednesday said at least 35 more rebels were killed in military operations elsewhere in Algeria.

Meanwhile, Islamist rebels killed six members of government forces, wounded two and killed a shepherd, the newspapers said.

They reported that 1,000 crack troops were advancing on rebel hideouts in Relizane, scene of some of the worst massacres of hundreds of civilians during last January.

she would support a resolution condemning Algeria in order to prod Algerians into accepting visits by U.N. envoys.

Ms. Robinson said: "Algeria posed a problem" since much of the violence was attributable to movements outside state control — mainly the hardline fundamentalist Armed Islamic Group — while the U.N. mainly investigates human rights abuses committed by government.

Washington's U.N. Ambassador Bill Richardson

Algeria pursues onslaught on rebels — newspapers

PARIS (R) — Elite Algerian forces backed by artillery and helicopter gunships pressed on with an 11-day-old offensive against rebels in the west of the country, Algerian newspapers said on Wednesday.

They have killed 130 rebels since the operation began 11 days ago against rebel bastions in the Ouarensenis mountain in the western province of Relizane, said the daily newspaper Saout Al Ahir.

Similar figures have been reported over the past few days by Algerian newspapers.

Algeria has been stricken by violence since 1992 when the authorities cancelled a general election in which Islamists had taken a commanding lead.

Western estimates say more than 65,000 people have died since then. The government has said that about 26,000 members of security forces and civilians were killed up to the end of 1997 but has given no figure on the deaths of the guerrillas.

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France frowns on Turkey's bid to integrate northern Cyprus

PARIS (AFP) — France on Wednesday frowned upon Turkey's bid to forge closer ties with the breakaway Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) saying that such moves would only hamper efforts to resolve the Cyprus problem.

"These plans also don't facilitate the process of rapprochement between Turkey and the European Union (EU), which we favour," said French Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Anne Gazeau-Secret.

Turkey and the TRNC announced in Ankara Tuesday that they were creating an economic union and would seek to forge closer political and defence ties.

Turkey has threatened to effectively annex the TRNC in response to the EU decision to open membership talks with the Greek-Cypriot dominated government of the internationally recognised Republic of Cyprus.

Cyprus has been divided into the Turkish-Cypriot north and Greek-Cypriot south since 1974 when Turkey invaded the island following a coup in Nicosia aimed at uniting Cyprus with Greece.

The TRNC proclaimed independence in 1983, but it is recognised only by Turkey, which has more than 30,000 troops stationed there.

State Department says inquiry continues in Saudi bombing

WASHINGTON (AP) — Saudi Arabia is still investigating details of the unsolved June 1996 bombing that killed 19 American airmen, the State Department said Tuesday.

"We are continuing to have exchanges with the Saudi government and have had repeated and very high-level assurances of cooperation from them," spokesman James Rubin said.

Reports from Riyadh quoted the kingdom's interior minister Monday as saying the Saudis had completed their investigation of the bombing of the Khobar Towers apartment complex in eastern Saudi Arabia.

U.S. officials have repeatedly complained that the Saudis have refused to share information and were dragging their

feet in the investigation.

"All the facts of this crime are with us and our intelligence exerted huge efforts to discover everything about the incident and we will leave the announcement for its time," Prince Nayef Ben Abdul Aziz said in Mecca Monday.

But Mr. Rubin said Tuesday "it was not all that clear" that the minister meant the Saudis had closed the investigation.

"On the contrary," Mr. Rubin said of the Saudi minister, "he appeared to be saying that the big picture — there's nothing new and nothing new to find, but they're working on the details."

"Well, most investigations focus on the details, and from that, one can build out understanding what might

have happened." Mr. Rubin added: "Let me say this. From the perspective of the United States, the Al Khobar bombing investigation remains wide open. We are continuing to have exchanges with the Saudi government and have had repeated and very high-level assurances of cooperation from them."

The bombing near Dhahran was touched off by terrorists who had driven a truck filled with explosives to the perimeter of the housing complex. Scores of airmen were wounded and the blast left a 25-metre crater.

The airmen were taking part in U.S. patrols over southern Iraq.

Turk PM says government needs 3 months

ANKARA (R) — Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz said his government, hit by speculation of early elections, needed three months to push anti-Islamist measures and economic reforms through parliament.

"Parliament needs to work for a full three months for our nine months' efforts to bear fruit," Anatolian news agency quoted Mr. Yilmaz as saying on Tuesday night.

But Mr. Yilmaz said he could not fix a date for early polls, as demanded by left-wing powerbroker Deniz Baykal.

"I don't think we can completely satisfy Mr. Baykal. We are looking for a middle ground he can accept," said Mr. Yilmaz, the head of a shaky minority coalition since last June.

Mr. Yilmaz said he would meet with the other coalition party leaders on

Thursday to discuss Mr. Baykal's proposals.

The government will probably need Mr. Baykal's support for draft bills to reform the leaky tax and social security systems, often blamed for Turkey's gaping budget deficit.

Mr. Yilmaz has also announced plans to legislate soon against what the government and powerful army see as an upsurge in Islamist activism.

Guinness makes April Fool of FT

LONDON (R) — The Financial Times, "pink paper" bible to Britain's business world, was red-faced on Tuesday after the drinks giant Guinness made an April Fool of the newspaper 24 hours early. Guinness put out a spoof press release under an April 1 embargo, announcing that it will become the official beer sponsor for the Greenwich observatory programme in the lead-up to the millennium. It said that Greenwich Mean Time would be renamed Guinness Mean Time until the end of 1999. The accurate speaking clock will be amended to feature "pint drips" instead of "pips" to count seconds. The Financial Times ran the story on an inside page.

Japan invents truth finder

TOKYO (AFP) — Japanese researchers have invented a machine that finds the real meaning, or "honne," in politicians' statements, a national newspaper said in an April Fool's report. The electronic "Honne Discovery Machine," invented by a special government institution, analyses the causal relationship between what politicians say and what they do, the Asahi Shimbun said, but Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto halted use of the machine after it was put to the test on his own remarks. The new machine translated the premier's statement: "We are not considering a concrete revision of the fiscal reform law" as "we made a mistake when we were lured by finance ministry sweet-talk into passing the fiscal reform law."

Parrot reveals fate of Marcos millions

HONG KONG (AFP) — A parrot named Cory that once belonged to Ferdinand Marcos has revealed where the late Philippines dictator stashed his missing millions, the BBC World Service's East Asia Today reported in its April 1 edition. The daily news roundup backed up its story with a deadpan report from Manila "correspondent" Frito Lopa, which discerning listeners may have spotted as an anagram of April Fool. The Philippines has been trying to recover billions of dollars allegedly plundered by Marcos before a revolution in 1986 which brought Corason "Cory" Aquino to power.

Wishful thinking!

LISBON (AFP) — If only it were true, sighed millions of Portuguese football fans on Wednesday as they almost fell victim to an April Fool's day joke. Radio Paris Lisbon announced that Iran had decided not to compete at the World Cup "for security reasons" and that FIFA had designated Portugal as their replacement. The station even broadcast spoof "declarations" in English from FIFA President Josep Havelange "confirming" the story. But while the Iranians gleefully prepare to pack their bags after ending Australia's hopes, the Portuguese, who failed to qualify, can only reflect on what might have been.

Mandela's 'marriage' an April Fool's joke

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — A South African presidential spokesman said that there was no truth in rumours that President Nelson Mandela had married his sweetheart Graca Machel during a luxury sea cruise this week. Any reports published to this effect on Wednesday should be treated as April Fool's stories, spokesman Parks Mankahlana said. "The Office of the President would like to warn all members of the media that rumours that President Mandela and Mrs Machel got married on the QEII are false," he said.

Saudi Arabia

SAUDI ARABIA (AFP) — Saudi officials said they were not planning to punish anyone for cooking on a portable stove in a tent at a religious camp this week. A portable stove was used by a group of pilgrims to cook food in a tent at the camp. The camp was located in the desert near the Saudi border with Iraq. The camp was used by pilgrims who were on their way to Mecca. The camp was destroyed by a fire on Wednesday. The fire was caused by a faulty gas connection. The fire killed 143 people and injured 243 people. The Saudi government is investigating the cause of the fire. The government is also planning to build a new camp for pilgrims. The new camp will be built in a safer location. The new camp will also have better fire safety measures. The new camp is expected to be completed by the end of the year.